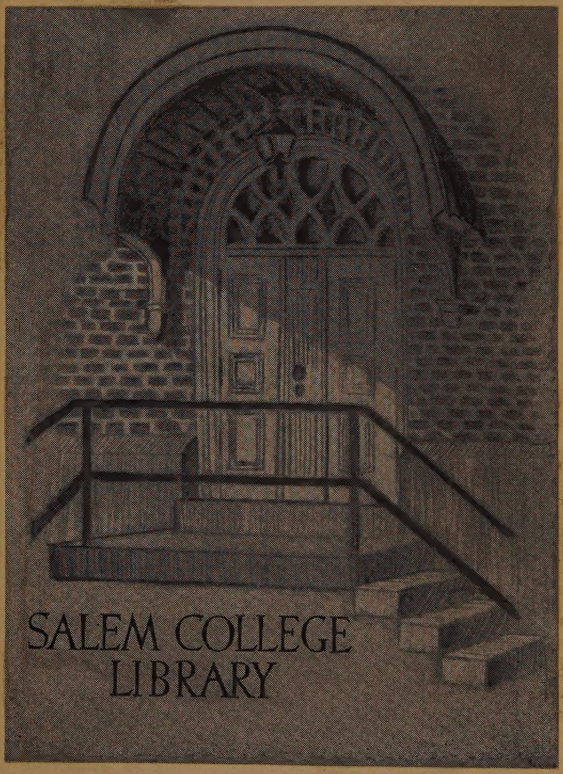
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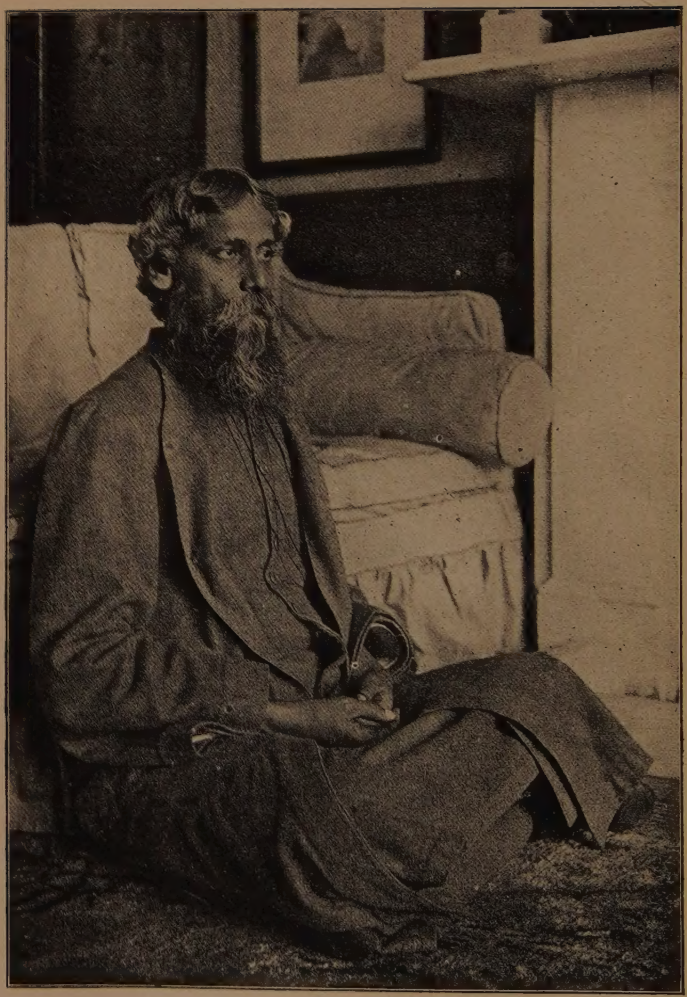

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RABINDRANATH TAGORE

A BIOGRAPHICAL STUDY

BY
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TO

HILDE SCHUSTER

AND TO THE MEMORY OF

ALFRED SCHUSTER

WHO DIED FOR HIS COUNTRY

"Grieve not for them who are to die, for all these are but phantom forms moulded upon that One Real that is Myself, unborn, undying, that neither slays nor can be slain."—"Bhagavad Ghita."

28582

PREFACE

"NATURE shut her hands and laughingly asked every day, 'What have I got inside?' and nothing seemed impossible."

These words from Rabindranath Tagore's autobiography, referring to the eager mornings of his early boyhood, may serve as key to the following account, which attempts to relate him both to the old tradition in India and to the new day anticipated in his writings. Such as they are, the chapters that succeed must be left now to answer for themselves; but at the last moment I am tempted to add two or three passages. For since this book was written things have happened which have sadly changed our perspective; and they serve to recall a day, before their faintest shadow had fallen, when this visitor from India, lying ill in London, scanned the omens and read them very uneasily.

It was one of the rare occasions, during his

visit, when we were able to talk uninterruptedly about the state of India and our own affairs, and he spoke with alarm of the temper of the great nations and the life of the great cities like Paris and London, whose love of luxury, need of sensation, and craving for excitement were up against every finer instinct he cherished. When he spoke of the forces in the Western world which he thought must become disruptive and lead to trouble, and stretched out his hands, it might have been the moral map of Europe, with its teeming continent and restless atoms, that lay spread out before him. The major energies, as he viewed them, were not constructive; they did not make for the world's commonwealth, and by their nature they must come into conflict sooner or later.

Now, as I recall that afternoon—not much more than a twelvemonth ago—it is impossible not to see in the present war the grim realisation of those misgivings; and that they were not the passing fancy of a sick man is shown by the frequent allusions in his own pages to the

same topic. In one, occurring in *Sādhanā*, he points out that the rival energies of the nations in the West tend to become aggressive. They are employed "in extending man's power over his surroundings, and the peoples are straining every nerve upon the path of conquest; they are ever disciplining themselves to fight Nature and other races; their armaments are getting more and more stupendous every day; their machines, their appliances, their organisations are for ever multiplying. . . ." The ancient civilisation of India, he goes on to say, had another ideal, which was that of the perfect comprehension of all, the inclusion of every element in the universe, and not the shutting out of any atom of God's creatures. Man's freedom and his fulfilment were not to be gained, in that Eastern belief, through war and the argument of the strong hand, but by love.

Once Gautama, we are told, saw a man bowing to the Four Quarters of the Heavens, the Nadir and the Zenith. It was an old rite he was performing—"with streaming hair, wet gar-

ments and clasped hands"; and Buddha knew he was doing it to avert evil, and told him thereupon that the true way to guard the regions of Heaven and Earth was by showering good deeds all around him. In this new dispensation he might look upon his father and mother as the East, his wife and children as the West, his masters and teachers as the South, his friends and companions as the North, the saints and religious mystics as the Zenith, and his servants and dependents as the Nadir. Could one have a better reading of a Symbol for the law of human fellowship and a love wide as the world?

What, then, will Buddha's enlightened followers say to our latest Gospel? Kant has been in his grave more than a century, and the latest word of the philosophy that succeeds to his, we are told, points to the declaration: "It is not enough to love your country. You must love it in full armour. Everything that is not IT must be hated. Hate is sacred." How different the voice of the patriot in *Gitanjali*, who speaks of a region "where the mind is without

fear and the head held high, where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow walls, where the mind is led forward into ever-widening thought and action:

Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake!

Beside this patriot-prayer you may put his song of "The Woman in Sorrow," who, like the wife of the murdered Burgomaster, was not to be comforted by the shout of conquest:

I seated her upon a car of victory and drove her from end to end of the earth.

Conquered hearts bowed down at her feet; shouts of applause rang in the sky.

Pride shone in her eyes for a moment; then it was dimmed in tears.

"I have no joy in conquest," she cried, the woman in sorrow.

But take another page from *Sādhanā*—one which is not veiled in parable:

"Whenever some ancient civilisation fell into decay and died, it was owing to causes which produced callousness of heart and led to the cheapening of man's worth; when either the state or some powerful group of men began to

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look upon the people as a mere instrument of their power; when, by compelling weaker races to slavery and trying to keep them down by every means, man struck at the foundation of his greatness. Civilisation can never sustain itself upon cannibalism of any form."

If it is hard for us now to read a book or listen to poetry without thinking of battle, murder and sudden death, and the mortal hatred of struggling nations, yet we must not leave this messenger of the dawn standing finally in a vista of war. Rather let us turn to his books in the spirit of a letter written to a friend in England about a year ago:

"A great pleasure," he said, "to imagine you cutting the pages of my new book, making discovery of some poem or other that strikes you with some new surprise, though you had read it before in the manuscript. I am sure these poems of mine are not mere literature to you, but convey to your heart the living voice of a friend who has often sat by your side."

The same letter gives a winter picture of the

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AT SHANTI NIKETAN.

writer's quarters at Shanti Niketan: "I am writing to you sitting in my room on the second floor of this house; a swelling sea of foliage is seen through the open doors all around me, quivering at the touch of the early winter's breath and glistening in the sunshine." It is in this familiar guise that one would like best to imagine him, a poet who is able to renew for us the sense of life in its energy and its true orient, as did that older poet who wrote of it in the Upanishads:

"Whenever the sun rises and sets, shouts of Hurrah! arise and all beings come to life, and whoever knows this and thinks of the sun as divine will hear those happy shoutings."

Blake might have imagined that and St. Francis thought it, and it is a message that is welcome whenever it comes. It may come by the saints and it may come by the poets; and if in this book it is with the latter kind that Rabindranath Tagore is ranged, it is because, through his lyric power, he is most likely in the end to prove its messenger.

These pages, finally, owe a great deal to the

aid of their Indian and other contributors, and in particular the writer's thanks are due to the Rev. C. F. Andrews and Mr. Kalimohun Ghose of Shanti Niketan, Dr. Seal of Calcutta University, Mr. G. Bose, Mr. Dinesh Chandra Sen, Dr. Coomaraswami, and Mr. R. Ranjan Sen. Also to Mr. William Rothenstein and Mr. W. B. Yeats for biographical and critical memoranda, "G. R." for contributions to various chapters, Mr. E. B. Havell for invaluable help in revising the proofs, Mr. A. H. Fox Strangways for information about Indian music, and the India Society for copies of its publications.

It is hardly necessary to add anything about the honour rendered the poet by the Nobel Prize award, unless to say that it was due to a distinguished Swedish Orientalist who had read the poems in Bengali before they appeared in English. India greatly appreciated the honour; as for the author himself, he was at first overwhelmed by the publicity it brought: "They have taken away my shelter," he wrote.

November 1914.

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RABINDRANATH TAGORE

CHAPTER I

THE UNKNOWN POET

The boughs touched his feet with their tribute of leaf and flower and fruit, and looked as if they welcomed a friend.—CHAITANYA CHARITAMRITA.

IN talking with the Indian poets you will find, said one of our early Orientalists, that they consider poetry a divine art, practised for untold ages in heaven before it was revealed on earth. Here in the west we have been rather forgetting latterly the old inspirational idea of poetry, though it has been developed anew from time to time by writers like Spenser, Coleridge and Shelley; and it is good for us to hear its reminder from a new quarter, and after a fashion that is better than any prose argument—in inspired verse itself. Such reminders, when they come, are apt to fall naturally without any noise or loud creaking of the press; and just so quietly it was that the first signs were heard of Rabindranath Tagore's poetry in our western world.

At an Indian play, given two autumns ago

on a London stage, my next neighbour, a stranger to me and a native of Bengal, asked me if I had read any of the other writings of the playwright? He went on to speak of these writings, verse and prose, with the enthusiasm of a disciple; in a way, indeed, to make one's ears tingle. His account had the effect of the tuning up of the fiddles before the actual music; or it was like that passage in the Vedic Hymn which speaks of the coming of the poet—the long-expected poet who has the gift of the supernal tongue. Within a week or two, one Sunday afternoon, my fellow-playgoer brought, according to promise, a volume of the new poetry in the original Bengali, along with some translations, and read them to us. None of us who listened to the recital could understand the liquid tongue in which the songs were written; but their rhythm was full of melody, and the English versions pointed to an imagination, innocent but rich in figurative life; while the reader's delight in them was infectious. Open belief in a poet is not often seen among us, and there was in this boyish tribute an ingenuous exuberant air which recalled the saying in the Upanishads: "If you were to tell this to a dry stick, branches and leaves would grow out of it."

A few months later, when the poet returned to England, we were able to realise for ourselves something of the spirit in him that affected his followers of the new generation in India, and his readers both there and here.

One of them allows me to quote some of her impressions written at the time: "His is an aspect that fixes itself deeply in that uncertain medium, the retina of the memory. It is easy to call up at any moment a mental picture of that tall and graceful form in the long loose coat of grey-brown; the white sensitive hands, large serenely-lit eyes, noble features, and curling hair and beard, dark and lightly touched with grey. Above all, the stately simplicity of his bearing struck me, for it implied a spiritual quality that diffused itself about his presence. The same thing helped to make him the kindest of hosts and gentlest of guests. Add to these qualities a certain incalculable gaiety; and you will still fail to understand his immense personal influence among his own people." The same writer adds: "You know that when at Calcutta he is announced to speak in a hall or public building, it is surrounded by crowds for whom there is no place within and who listen outside for the sound of his voice. It would

be impossible to exaggerate his vogue in his own land; and as for his songs—they are sung, words and music, through the length and breadth of India."

On one occasion in London, after the reading of the poet's play *Chitra*, Mr. Montague, the Under Secretary of State for India, described how, when riding through an Indian forest at night, he came upon a clearing where two or three men sat round a fire. Not being certain of his road, he was glad to dismount and rest his tired horse. Shortly after he had joined the group, a poor-looking, ill-clothed lad came out of the forest and sat down also at the fire. First one of the men sang a song and then another. The boy's turn came, and he sang a song more beautiful both in words and music than the rest. When asked who had made the song he said that he did not know; "they were singing these songs everywhere." A while after, Mr. Montague heard the words and music again, this time in a very different place, and when he asked for the name of the maker of the song he heard for the first time the name of Rabindranath Tagore.

Knowing the extraordinary fame that this story suggests—a fame implying the spirit of

a religious teacher, moreover, as well as that of a poet—we had been almost afraid of receiving such a guest in our dry unceremonious English fashion. But nothing could exceed the simplicity and unpretentiousness of this visitor from an older world. He was content to take things as he found them, and did not expect one to discourse all day on philosophy or on the doctrines of the Upanishads. He could tell delightful stories, gay or sad; he had the humour that could take pleasure in the incongruities of men; and he could on rarer occasions be prevailed upon to sing his songs to the veritable wild and beautiful Indian melodies out of which they were born. At other times, if the English sun was only good enough to shine, it was pleasure enough for him to sit on the grass in a Hampstead garden and listen to the noises of the town carried over the roofs and tree-tops. His understanding of life, his acceptance of its cares, his delight in its common occurrences, were not those we had hitherto associated with the notion of an Indian ascetic. If there was that in his face and expression which told of a peace won by hard and long probation and a discipline like that of the Yogi who despised the flesh, it only remained now as a quality added to his sympathy.

Those who have read his poems in *Gitanjali* and *The Gardener*, and have fathomed the philosophy of life's realisations expressed in the pages of *Sādhanā*, may wonder what impressions a great city like London would leave on the mind of a poet reared among such different surroundings? After many experiences here and in America, he was left, I fear, with an uneasy sense of the life of our great cities. The spectacle of multitudes of men and women avid for sensation, one and all bent upon getting and gaining advantage over their neighbours, troubled him. It gave an ominous turn to a casual discussion that began one day when he had been ill and was lying in bed convalescent, in a room full of flowers, with a tell-tale glimpse through the windows of an ordinary dull London street on a wet summer's afternoon. He had been reading that powerful romance of an artist at odds with circumstance who has to fight hard for his art in the greedy world of Paris, *Jean Christophe;* and he was curiously concerned at the picture of a soul in trouble, and at the conditions of life which went to determine that trouble, displayed in the pages of the book. "You people over here," he said, "seem to me to be all in a state of continual strife. It is all struggling, hard

striving to live. There is no place for rest, or peace of mind, or that meditative relief which in our country we feel to be needed for the health of our spirits."

In much the same degree in which our noisy activity over here affected him, he was able to affect us in turn by the imperturbable peace of his own bearing. He seemed to have the power to make an ordinary room, a London house, a lecture hall, a company of people, the vehicle of his Indian serenity. He went through many occasions, often very trying ones, without losing his equanimity, although he did lose his powers of work.

There was one occasion in particular which may be recalled because there were elements in it that brought East and West into new relations. The Indian students over here, many of them his disciples, had resolved to hold a festival in his honour, and in doing this were able to take advantage of the presence in London of Sarojini Naidu, a fellow-poet and an eloquent upholder of the ideals of Young India. There is no way to describe the enthusiasm of an occasion that depends for its fervour on the very voice and spirit of the hour. But by the naturalness of his re-

sponse, Rabindranath was able to cast his spell over the place, and to make that ungainly interior at Piccadilly Circus, with its strangely mixed audience, English and Indian, into a scene such as one might associate with his own life at Bolpur and the quiet of Shanti Niketan. And what was not least impressive was his recognition that it was for his own people first of all that he made his songs,—represented by the crowd of his disciples who stood there listening to him. They formed indeed an extraordinary line of intent faces—"a hedge of eyes"—and it was well his foreign friends should take part in such a function because there we were able to realise something of what he meant to his Indian followers. He was to them not so much a poet, a creator of delightful and living literary forms which could express their own hopes and aspirations; he was a national leader who had already set up in Bengal an ideal college—"a little Academe"—whose pupils and students were to go forth to help in the task of delivering the soul of a new India. It was so that the disciples of Pragapati might have hung upon his words, as we read in the Upanishads.

CHAPTER II

BOY AND MAN

"Please, sir, tell me still more," said the son.
"Be it so, my child," the father replied.

Upanishad.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE was born in Calcutta in 1861, son of the Maharshi Devendranath Tagore, who gave lustre to a name already honoured throughout India. As for the surname, changed familiarly over here into Tagore, it is in the original "Thakur," which means literally a god or a lord.[1]

He lost his mother when he was still a child, and this loss meant a great deal to him. It gave him a peculiar regret for the mother's love, so sharply broken off in his experience; and further, it threw him back upon the consolations to be had in that boyish communion with Nature which helped to fill the solitary days of his childhood. Hear his own account of these years, as given to a friend:[2]

[1] "You may hear a Bengal villager say at any time, 'O Thakur, forgive me.'"

[2] Rev. C. F. Andrews.

"I was very lonely—that was the chief feature of my childhood. My father I saw very seldom; he was away a great deal, but his presence pervaded the whole house and was one of the deepest influences on my life. Kept in charge of the servants after my mother died, I used to sit, day after day, in front of the window and picture to myself what was going on in the outer world. From the very first time I can remember I was passionately fond of Nature. Ah, it used to make me mad with joy when I saw the clouds come up in the sky one by one. I felt, even in those very childish days, that I was surrounded with a friend, a companionship, very intense and very intimate, though I did not know how to name it. I had such an exceeding love for Nature, I cannot tell how to describe it to you; but Nature was a kind of loving companion always with me, and always revealing to me some fresh beauty."

A passage in his *Givansmriti*, or "Reminiscences," completes the picture of a child's solitary life.

"In the morning of autumn," he writes, "I would run into the garden the moment I got up from sleep. A scent of leaves and grass, wet with dew, seemed to embrace me, and the dawn,

all tender and fresh with the new awakened rays of the sun, held out its face to me to greet me beneath the trembling vesture of palm leaves. Nature shut her hands and laughingly asked every day, 'What have I got inside?' and nothing seemed impossible."

As for the school-days that followed, he told us how cruelly one of his masters used to treat him, ordering him to stand for hours unprotected in the heat of the burning sun if his lessons had not been perfectly learned. In this way education was made to seem forbidding instead of agreeable to the boy's natural desire for knowledge. When his father came to understand how much he was made to suffer by the harsh discipline, he was put under the care of private tutors. In other ways the father gave the boy his head, as we might say, to his immense advantage. For, far from being slow or unwilling to learn, here was one eager for learning. Words and ideas, music and old tunes and *ragas*, moved him to the heart; and while still a boy he began to write rhymes, songs, stories—anything that could express his joy of life. It is not surprising that most of his early verse was imitative: he began, we are told, with a study and imitation of the old Vaish-

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nava poets of Bengal, Chandidas and Vidypati: but his full birth as an original poet began about the age of eighteen. Nature then took stronger hold on him, and the outcome is to be seen in his early songs which are to be found in the two series, *Pravata-Sangita* and *Sandhya-Sangita* ("Songs of Sunrise" and "Songs of Sunset"). Their character, highly idealistic and subjective, moody or fanciful, may be gathered from the criticism of Dr. Seal:

"Along with the waxing and waning light, the rising or setting sun," he writes, "come floating to the poet's soul aerial phantasms and drowsy enchantments, memories of days of fancy and fire, ghostly visitings and flashes of Maenad-like inspiration, which the poet seizes in many a page of delicate silver-lined introspection or imaginative verse. In these songs Bengali poetry rises to the height of neoromanticism."

The very titles of the "Evening Songs" unmistakably define their note of foreboding and the young poet's melancholy,—"Despair in Hope," "Suicide of a Star," "Invocation to Sorrow," "The Woman without a Heart," "Heart's Monody." According to the same friendly critic, the intense egoism and subjective

feeling of these songs is without a parallel in modern Indian poetry. "The singer indeed appears to be under the influence of a poetic henotheism, that is to say the entire universe assumes the hue of the poet's mood, while it lasts, giving rise to a kind of universal hallucination."

"The Songs of Sunrise," which came later, are in a braver key, and the themes are more auspiciously conceived,—"The Dream of the Universe," "The Eternity of Life," "Reunion with Nature," "Desideria," and "The Fountain awakened from its Dream." The second of these, with its three realms of Song, Love, and Life, is a remarkable poem, which (says Dr. Seal) just misses reaching the height of Goethe's "Three Reverences," or De Quincey's "Three Ladies of Sorrow." A companion poem, "The Eternity of Death," seizes the truth that life itself is realised through a series of changes or deaths, but strains the theme through too vague an emotional medium.

Of the place these lyrics hold in the neoromantic movement in India it is impossible for us over here to judge. They gained their effect by the sheer power, it seems, of an individual style in poetry which used elementary feelings and images

to effect the required transfiguration; and they appear to have brought about something like a revolution in the diction and the freer cadence of Bengali verse. Here, too, should be mentioned Rabindranath's work in another mode, his highly imaginative reconstruction, under the name of *Vanu Sinha*, of the loves of Radhika and Krishna on the banks of the Jumna, which has been likened to the reproduction of medieval Italian romance by Keats. Those who have followed the prose and verse of the movement from which it sprang, and know what Neo-Hinduism meant for the young poets of thirty years ago, can alone relate it for us to its period. But Navina Chandra Sen's *Raivataka*, which is the epic of the Hindu religious revival, is still a closed book to us in England. As for the *Valmikir Jaya*, or "The Three Forces" (physical, intellectual, and moral), of Haraprasada Shastri—"the most glorious phantasmagoria" in Indian literature, touched with the sublimity of the Himalayas,—it is to us only a name, remote as their heights. With the literary enthusiasms and romantic ideas that these works of his contemporaries recall ends the first, or Calcutta period, of his career.

The second period was spent away from cities,

and began with his marriage at the age of twenty-three. Then came the question of facing real life. His father, the Maharshi, had designed he should go to the country to manage the family estate at Shilaida on the banks of the Ganges. Much against his first inclination, he went to his task there; but it proved of direct service to him in the way of human experience. For there he came into touch with the real life of the people, and wrote down, hot from the life, tales and parables dealing with their everyday affairs. There, too, he wrote some of his greater plays, among them "Chitvargada," "Visayan," and "Raja-o-Rani."

His familiar surroundings, and the kind of existence they helped to colour at this time, may be found reflected in pages of *The Gardener*, and in some of the stories outlined or retold in a succeeding chapter, "The Tale-Teller." This Shilaida period lasted in all some seventeen years.

Then came a break—what he learnt to look upon as his *Varsha Shesha*, or "fall of the year." It was indeed the end of his mid-summer. Death came and looked him in the face: he lost first his beloved wife; then, within a very few months, from consumption, the daughter who took her place;

and then his youngest son. He was on the verge, too, of his fortieth year—a time when a man needs to gather his own folk about him. A premonition of trouble had come to him not many months before, when he had given up his stewardship at Shilaida.

"He seemed," says his biographer, "to anticipate some vast sorrow and change, for which these quiet unbroken years in the country had been a solemn preparation."

The outcome of the restlessness that seized upon him was a determination to do something, while his energies still held good, for the new generation. Hence the idea of the small republic at Shanti Niketan. In the midst of the work needed to initiate the project, his troubles came fast upon him; the book that expresses them and their dire effect is *Gitanjali*, the book by which we first learnt to know him in England. One set of lyrics in especial—Nos. 83 to 93—marks the probation that seemed to teach him the second deliverance of which the Upanishads speak.

"This death-time," he said, "was a blessing to me. I had through it all, day after day, such a sense of fulfilment, of completion, as if nothing were lost. I felt that if even a single atom in

the universe seemed lost, it would not really be lost. . . . I knew now what Death was. It was perfection—nothing lost!"

With *Gitanjali* we are within reach of his second visit to the west. He has recognised that his setting sail on this later voyage to England and America was to make a change in his outlook. "As I crossed the Atlantic and spent on board ship the beginning of the new year," he wrote in a letter at the time, "I realised that a new stage in my life had come, the stage of a voyager." And this voyage again was associated inevitably with constructive social ideas and the work at Shanti Niketan, designed to aid in the building up of a Golden Bengal and the hope of the new Indies.

With most of us, at such a pause in our lives, the search for reality ends in our adjusting ourselves more or less comfortably to the work-a-day world. We test our relative effect by money, position, and the good opinion of the community; and at middle-age settle into our hole, and accept paper-solutions of the problems of our time. It is different with those who can renew their youth, and gain a fresh access of power at the very barriers of middle age. Such was the reinforcement that occurred to this poet who came out of his

grief to find, as Srimanta did, the lotus-flowers blooming in the sea-waste that had threatened him.

He read the signs anew with the courage of a seaman who is kindred to the wild element, and holds it his friend whatever it brings him—life or death? In another letter of this time he uses a phrase which gains effect from the weight he has lent it—the "making of man." It is so that Celtic folk will sometimes speak of "making the soul." But now it was the soul of the world that was to be made; and to bring about such a renaissance, there was needed, in his conception, a more humane order, a finer science of life, and a spiritual republic behind our world-politics. We may venture to enlarge his hope as we think it over, and to connect it with that other—the binding in one commonwealth of the United States of the World. The union of nations, the destroying of caste, religious pride, race-hatred, and race-prejudice—in a word, the "Making of Man"; there lies his human aim. "It is," he says, "the one problem of the present age, and we must be prepared to go through the martyrdom of sufferings and humiliations till the victory of God in man is achieved."

CHAPTER III

SOME INDIAN POETS

We must get Bengal in a homelier perspective, and call it Gaur as the Hindu does, and garnish it with paddy-fields, and realise the fierceness and lustre of its sun, and the savour of its soil, before we can fill in the background to *Gitanjali*. There were five Gaurs in India, according to one author; but Bengal alone bears the name to-day, and when we cast up its associations, and listen to the songs made out of affection for it, we begin to understand that there is something special belonging to it, an idiosyncrasy, not easy for a European to fix—as affecting to its own folk as a Tyneside accent to a Northumbrian.

We think of Rabindranath's English versions, his "prose-verse," as so familiar, so obvious in its rhythm, that we hardly care to realise it in the original. He seems in his English to have touched the natural tongue of poetry that brings countries and men together. But talk

to one of his fellow-countrymen about it, and you begin to perceive that there are accents and cadences, lights and shades, that we miss inevitably—strains of the Vaishnava songs, or of a folk-song that was heard in the forest of Vrinda before the English language began to be. And as for the language in which the Vaishnava poets wrote their songs—Rabindranath's mother-tongue—no one but a native can hope to gather up its force and variety of idiom. Turn for some account of its struggles for survival (not unlike those of the Welsh) to the remarkable great book, over a thousand pages long, in which Dinesh Chandra Sen has traced its record. There we hear how jealous the Brahmins were of its use as a written tongue. They wanted the truths of their religion "to be locked up in the Sanskrit texts," and they were afraid of any movement that could give status to the vernacular. Probably they thought, he adds, that the purity of their doctrine would be lost in what they looked upon as a mere provincial dialect. But this hints already at a contempt for Bengali that lasted for centuries, and has helped in our time to quicken the ridicule often cast upon the people and their supposed patois.

As the genius of a Chaucer gave to English poetry a new quality, so that of a Chandi Das arrived to quicken the poetry of Bengal. True, the two poets and their different ways of writing seem almost to belong to different planets. The Indian poet, like the English, writes of love, and he has his stock of legendary and romantic allusions; but his songs are strung on the devotee's sacred thread; we have no "Prologue" with a religious pilgrimage serving as excuse for the humour of the road. However when we try to make our picture of Bengal, we can learn much from Chandi Das. We cannot forget how he outraged the Brahmins by saying that the lovely washerwoman, Rāmī (her calling does not sound, alas! quite the same in English), was as holy in his eyes as the sacred hymn of Gayatri, mother of the Vedas. But he meant it really, ideally, and without thought of extravagance.

Chandi Das has a local tie that connects him with Rabindranath; in early life he settled at the village of Naunura, ten miles south-east of Bolpur. In Eastern Bengal a man of uncommon faculty is sometimes called a "mad Chandi," but the epithet is one that has an

accent of tenderness. It does not imply any shade of contempt. In his case it helps to convey the idea of his poetic afflatus, which was such as to satisfy Plato's claim in "Ion" for the divine madness of the true poet. Love, in its most abstract, most exalted forms, was the burden of his songs. He is like a Vaishnava writing two centuries before their time. He writes the *Purva Raga*, or "Dawn of Love," of Love's Messenger, its secret pilgrimage, of lovers' meetings, and of their final separation. In his "Dawn of Love" Krishna appears as a spiritual vision to Radha. "She has caught a glimpse of his dark blue complexion." It has acted on her like some strong spell. "What pain has overtaken her?" the poet asks. "She loves solitude, and sits alone, and will listen to none."

The songs of Chandi Das call up the region whence they sprang—the varying colours of its air, the different lustre of its sun, the particular savours of the soil. From others we hear of its sky, so blue in early spring, fog-obscured in winter, beclouded and thunder-threatened in the rainy season. To the Hindu, living so much in the open air and so close to mother earth, the weather matters vitally, just as it does to

the paddy-fields. Nature changes very markedly from month to month. So the *Varamasi*, or description of the twelve months, is a chosen theme of the old Indian poets, as the early *Shepherd's Kalender* was with the English.

When you read *Gitanjali* or *The Gardener* you feel how well the poet has loved his region. It is nature's demesne, and with him as with Chandi Das or Nimai, nature is very near supernature. For the two zones cross in India as they do not in our western countries. It is much easier for the Hindu to pass the confines than for us who have shut out the supersensual and tried to make it seem absurd in the face of a civilisation whose end is creature-comfort. The feeling of the Bengal peasant for nature's moods may be seen in the folk-songs about her deities, such as Siva, who express her terror and beauty. To be sure, in the Indian mythology, Siva appears to lie beyond the sphere of pleasure and pain; the immovable amid the flux of things, eternity in the midst of time. But the country-folk of Bengal who love, like other peasants, to see things in the concrete, have not hesitated to bring him down into the paddy-fields and to their own village doors.

The Puranas may paint Siva as the body of death, on which dances Kali in her ecstasy, but in the old folk-songs we see Siva putting off the god and becoming a peasant, a beggar, and a hemp-smoker. In these Siva songs, whose singers have usually an Ekatara, or one-stringed lute, the changes and rural events of the year occur as a matter of course. The cephalica flower falls to the ground in showers under the clear autumn sky of Bengal; the breeze seems to blow more softly in the season to which they belong. Siva has a wife, Uma, but he is no provident mate; he is old and rascally, and so poor that he is unable even to find a pair of shell-bracelets for his bride, though she is the daughter of a king, and that king is Mount Himavati. Thus the sorrows of Siva's girl-bride are a common theme, and the feelings of Menaka her mother become in the songs so affecting that the eyes of many a child-wife glisten behind her veil, and the hearts of the mothers cry out for the daughters who have been taken away from them when mere children.

Among the true followers of Siva the form of Uma represents the fineness and delicacy of earthly life, and that of Siva the terror and

grimness of death. Here, as in the real world, youth and age, life and death, are united, and the flower that blooms and the flower that fades appear on the same bough. In this embrace of life by death the Hindu devotee does not see anything to strike terror to his heart. He takes it as an expression of a law of nature and views it with a reverence to be traced in these songs. So every peasant, we are told, while hearing or singing songs about Siva and Uma, knows that Siva is above every earthly object: he is divine and immaculate and above all desire.

Through the legends of Siva and Kali, and the folk-songs and the Vaishnava songs, we discover the marked individuality of this region, in which poets sprang up like birds at a woodside. Song is a custom of the country. Its folk need music as they need rice. Even the snakes are put into songs; and in the story of that son of India who came cursed into the world, and was incarnated as a great hunter, we have a lovely lyric landscape, with cows and milkmaids, lit by the morning sun, as a setting for the scene where he finds the golden lizard.

There is one poet, Mukundarama, who describes Bengal with a certain realism and as

he saw it. The late Professor Cowell termed him "the Crabbe of Bengal," who loved his native village none the less because he was exiled from it under the Muhamedan tyranny. "All honest men," he said, "live in Damunya; in its southern quarter live the poets and the good scholars. The great divine Siva himself in his grace has been to Damunya." As for its river, Ratnanu, its water is dear to him as that of the Ganges itself. It was by drinking it, he says, that he became endowed with poetry. The true ichor of Gauda ran indeed in his veins. Wherever he may place his scenes, in Siva's heaven, or India or Ceylon, said Professor Cowell, "he never loses sight of Bengal."

Water means so much in India; every Bengal poet makes much of his native stream or river. Wherever and whenever Nimai saw a river flowing by him he heard in it the rustling and murmuring of the Jumna which he associated with Krishna. As for the poems on Ganga Devi, the river-goddess, the spirit of the Ganges, they tell us how precious she was to the Gaur-born Hindoo. "When dying," says Chanda Sen, "we must have at least a drop of Ganges water, or we feel disconsolate at the hour of

death." Fancy an Englishman languishing for a drop of Thames water on his death-bed!

So much one is tempted to say about Rabindranath Tagore's native region, because alike in reading his poems and in talking to him about the things that have most affected his imagination, one realises that he owed much of his endowment to his early years and surroundings there. When he pictures the beauty of the earth it is with a sky like that whose blue radiance filled Radha with ecstasy stretched over its trees and pools and cow pastures. When he looks back for those associations which knit up one's feeling about life and its pleasantness and human continuity, it is with the music of the *ragas* in songs like those of Rama Ra Sada that he finds them conditioned. And as for the language in which they are uttered, we have to talk with one whose mother-tongue it is to appreciate its full resource, and those elements and qualities in it which have made it pliant under the lyric spell. We test a language by its elasticity, its response to rhythm, by the kindness with which it looks upon the figurative desires of the child and the poet. In these essentials, Bengali proves its right to a

place among the regenerative tongues of the world. As for its rhythmic life, though I cannot quote instances in the original of its force, there are many songs to be had whose power of melody triumphs even over imperfect translation into English. Take that one song of Govinda Das in which Radha says, "Let my spirit be turned into a summer breeze for the fan with which Krishna cools himself. Whenever he moves, like a new-born cloud, may I become the sky behind him, to form the pale background of his heavenly form."

The Bengali idiom needs to be traced in every form it assumes—religious, literary, or popular. Take a leaf of the book of the sage, Lomasa. One day the son of the god Indra came to him and said that he wanted to build him a hut to shelter him. "No need of that," said he, "since life is so short." "How long then will you live?" the other asked; and he replied, "The fall of every one of my hairs will take the whole cycle of an Indra's reign. When all my hair is fallen, my death will surely come." The figurative note is heard again in a song of Rasu's which the villagers sing, in which he says, "Let your mind be the bird Chakora, and cry for a drop

of mercy even as the bird cries for a drop of water from the clouds." Or in this, on the evening of death: "When death will come and pull me by the hair, they will get ready the bamboo for me, and send me out of the house with a poor earthen pitcher, stripped like a Sanyasi of my clothes." Or this from a *Tappa* song by a poet who was living in the time of Burns and wrote love songs that something offer his passionate sincerity: "If only my beloved would love me, the scentless *Kinsuka* flower would grow fragrant, the thorny *Ketaki* would grow without a thorn, the *Sandal* would flower and the sugar cane bear fruit."

Two more instances: the first is from Chandi Das, a lover's consolation: "To be a true lover, one must be able to make a frog dance in the mouth of a snake." The other is from one of the tales told by a country tale-teller or *Kathaka*, a description of an Indian noonday so hot that "the buffalo and the bear dipping themselves in a pool doze in the very act and half close their eyes."

A fostering country, a song-loving people, inspiring forerunners and a susceptible mother-tongue—these are needed to beget the true

poet; and enough has been said now of the land of Gaur or Bengal to show how propitious were its sun, its soil, and its air to the genius of Rabindranath Tagore. It enabled him to have faith alike in the spirit of poetry, in the sympathy of his hearers, and in himself whose fibres were so strung, in accord with its traditional *ragas*, that they answered instinctively to its lightest call.

One other poet might have been added to the roll of his forerunners, in some ways the most nearly related to him of them all. This is Nimai or Chaitanya Deva; but it is in regard to a special book, *Gitanjali*, that we can best range his influence and mysterious powers, which after many centuries are still alive in India; and the account of his career may be left to that chapter.

CHAPTER IV

"THE GARDENER"

O rose, what art thou to be compared with her bright face? She is fresh, and thou art rough with thorns.—HAFIZ.

THOSE of us who made our first acquaintance with Rabindranath through *Gitanjali* may, on turning to the pages of *The Gardener*, be deceived by an apparent likeness of rhythm and colour into thinking the poems of the same stock. But in reality they belong to another phase; they are the songs of his earlier manhood, drawn largely from three volumes, entitled *Sonar Tari*, *Manasi*, and *Chitra*. We lose much, it is said, of the charm of their original measures, because the English medium gives them a demurer, more serious air than that intrinsically belonging to them.

A fellow-countrywoman of their writer, herself a poet, said that to understand his hold over his Bengali readers, especially the younger generation, it was indispensable to read the songs of his youth in the original. Others have

spoken of the infectious melody, whose notes suggest the very spirit of the Indian flute. In the use of the refrain and other devices, the songs of *The Gardener* betray an exuberant delight in lyric art; they depend on music, and the music tempts him to a more rapid flight in his invocations and love passages.

In the fifth song the flute itself brings the verse to its climax and gives the refrain:

I am restless, I am athirst for far-away things,
My soul goes out in a longing to touch the skirts of the dim distance.
O Great Beyond, O the keen call of thy flute!
I forget, I ever forget, that I have no wings to fly, that I am bound in this spot evermore.

I am eager and wakeful, I am a stranger in a strange land.
Thy breath comes to me whispering an impossible hope.
Thy tongue is known to my heart as its very own.
O Far-to-seek, O the keen call of thy flute!
I forget, I ever forget, that I know not the way, that I have not the winged horse.

From this song and refrain we can imagine with what swaying movement and lightness of step the music leads the original Indian words to their melody. In these versions the pattern on the page often looks definite as that of any

I will utter your name, sitting alone among the shadows of my silent thoughts.
I will utter it without words, I will utter it without purpose.
For I am like a child that calls its mother an hundred times, glad that it can say "Mother."

— 11 —

Infinite is your wealth but it is your wish to receive it in small measure, to receive it through me from my little hands
That is why you have made me rich with your own riches and have come to my door yourself though my door is shut.
You will not drive in your chariot, swifter than thought, but it is your wish to come down on the dust and walk with me step by step.

— 11 —

My life when young was like a flower, — a flower that loosens a petal or two from her abundance to give them away and never feel the loss when the spring breeze woos her with insistent whispers.
Now at the end of her youth my life is like a fruit, having nothing to spare, and waiting to offer herself completely with her full burden of sweetness.

REDUCED FACSIMILE AUTOGRAPH POEM (1913).

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ordinary English lyric; but the actual tune makes light of the lines and rhyme pauses which an English musician would emphasise in setting his song. The Indian minstrel enhances one line or phrase, softens another by a fine diminuendo, and then by an aerial turn of the vocal melody gives a delightful waywardness to the next stave.

The influence upon Rabindranath's verse of the old Vaishnava poets has already been noticed. One of his Indian biographers tells us that two master-influences helped to decide the bent of his mind: the one he owed to his father, the other to the Vaishnava poetry. It was the spirit as well as the letter and congenial forms of that poetry that helped to mould his poetic character. In essence a poetry of revolt, it was in sympathy with all that was best in the folk-life of the country invoking a religion that tended to break down the academic tradition in literature and helped to break in actual life the law of caste. "The Vaishnavas," says Dinesh Chandra, "infused new life into the literature and the spirit of the age, just when the vitality of the Hindoo race was threatening to sink."

When Rabindranath was a boy he went with his father on a long pilgrimage along the great rivers and over the plains of Bengal and up to the foot of the Himalayas. During these wanderings the spirit of nature conspired with the art of the Vaishnava singers to teach him a lyric philosophy of life, none the less real because in youth it was a half-unconscious influence. Its first and its wildest expression was in the early books already described, which have not been turned into English.

The sounds of wind and water, and the rhythms of nature, are used in *The Gardener* at every turn to enhance the song of the lover and the romance of his desire:

> Does the earth like a harp shiver into song with the touch of my feet?
>
> Is it true that the dewdrops fall from the eyes of night when I am seen, and that the light of the morning is glad when it wraps my body round?

In the second song we have the key to the book. There the poet, as if realising that the world might look upon him as too remote from the passions of men and women, dramatises the question and answer:

"Ah, poet, the evening draws near; your hair is turning grey.
"Do you in your lonely musing hear the message of the hereafter?"

"It is evening," the poet said, "and I am listening because some one may call from the village, late though it be.
"I watch if young straying hearts meet together, and two pairs of eager eyes beg for music to break their silence and speak for them.
"Who is there to weave their passionate songs, if I sit on the shore of life and contemplate death and the beyond?"

There, as it were, the poet of the earth and the joy of earth replies to the Indian ascetic.

As to those readers who are not prepared to go back from the poet of *Gitanjali* to the writer of love-songs and the singer enamoured of the keen sensations of the earth, he would tell them as he did one dissatisfied soul, "Forgive me, if I too have been young!"

But in truth the more one looks into his poetry the more clearly one sees that the two poets of 1879 and of 1909 are one and the same at heart. The songs of divine love, set to Indian melody in the later book, are matched by the lyric interpretation of human love in the pages of *The Gardener*. Love's prodigal, in this romantic interlude, only spends himself that he may break out of the circle of the lower sensation

to attain the elusive clue to the world that is beyond the world:

I know not what wine of the wild poppy I have drunk, that there is this madness in my eyes. There are eyes that smile and eyes that weep, and there is madness in my eyes.

The memory that comes to such a prodigal is overwhelming; it seems that the emotion of the ages is behind him:

Do the memories of banished months of May linger in my limbs? . . .

Is it true that your love travelled through all the ages of the world in search of me?

In the measure of that past and its human accumulations lurks the sign of the desire of what is to come:

Is it then true that the mystery of the Infinite is written on this little forehead of mine?

It is the true follower of Nimái, the worshipper of the heaven that descends to earth, who writes these songs; who in them proclaims that the road to the supernal beauty leads through the commonest of love's experiences:

No, my friends, I shall never be an ascetic, whatever you may say. . . . If I cannot find a shady shelter and a companion for my penance, I shall never turn ascetic.

The Welsh poet, Dafydd ap Gwilym, when the Grey Brother turned upon him and showed him the perils that lay in love of woman, knew very well what to reply. He said in so many words that he had found his poet's paradise with one perfect daughter of summer in a birch grove: "Come with me to the birch-tree church, to share in the piety of the cuckoo amid the leaves, where we, with none to intrude on us, shall attain heaven in the green grove."

The Indian poet replies to the monk, and says that the spring winds, driving the dust and the dead leaves away, are blowing away with them his monitions:

> For we have made truce with Death for once, and only for a few fragrant hours we two have been made immortal.

We should remember that in the Indian tradition the lyric symbolism of such poems is easily translated from what we may call the dialect of earth into the language of heaven. Dinesh Chandra Sen tells us how an old man inverted a love-song of Chandi Das:

> "In 1894," he says, "I was residing in Tapira. It was early in June. The clouds had gathered on the horizon, and they made the darkness of night a shade

more black. An illiterate Vaishnava devotee was playing on a lute made of a long gourd and singing to it, 'Dark is the night and thick are the clouds, how could you, my love, come by the path on such a night? There is the garden. I see him in the rain, and my heart breaks at the sight.' The poet ends by saying that 'the story of this love will gladden the world'; but, as the old man sang, his voice was fairly choked with tears. When asked why he wept, he said it was because of the song. Thereupon he was told that it was only an ordinary love-song, with nothing in it to cause such feeling. But he did not so consider it. He replied, 'I am full of sin. My soul is covered with darkness. In my deep distress I beckoned the merciful God to come to me, and he came, and I found him waiting at the gate of my house.' The thought of his mercy choked my voice, 'Dark is the night, and thick are the clouds, how could you, my love, come by the path on such a night?'"

Tears still dropped from the eyes of the old man as his fingers played on the lute, and he hummed mournfully, "Dark is the night and thick are the clouds."

To those who read Rabindranath's poems in the original, the break, such as it is, between the moods of *Gitanjali* and *The Gardener* hardly exists in the same degree. In these books the reader has the essence of a much larger body of verse, representing every mood and every stage of the poet's history; and in their pages the

spirit of his youth and the desires and irresistible impulses of youth are merged naturally in the poetry of his mature experience. The copy of his collected poems—a curious, attractive-looking large quarto, bound in plain crimson boards without adornment, printed with the cursive Bengali type in double columns, and published at Calcutta—serves as a very tantalising reminder of the amount of his verse that is still untranslated. It must contain in all about ten times as much matter as we have in the present English books, of which *The Gardener* is first in order of time.

The middle pages of *The Gardener* contain a cycle of love-songs, twenty or thirty in all, among which are several that answer perfectly, we are told, to the Vaishnava musical type. To know their spell, we should be able to hear them sung to their Indian accompaniment and fully reinforced with the emotional life of the *ragas* or tunes to which they were set. In some of the old English songs which express a passionate love-motive we find, when we turn to the music, that the words are wedded to a minor strain, in which to our modern ears there is a note of reminiscent melancholy, but appar-

ently no strain of passion. So it is with the music of these songs: there is a sighing cadence in some of the most passionate stanzas, as if the music turned to the wind and the streams to find an accompaniment for the rhythm of the words, born of the desire of young lovers. Take the twenty-ninth song in this cycle. It uses a motive which has been used again and again in the love-songs of other countries—in the *aubades* of Provence, the folk-songs of Tuscany, the Elizabethan lyrics and the songs of the English lutanists. There is no note in it which has not been used before, but in its very simplicity it is affecting, for it runs to love's perennial melody. One has only to add to its words the minor strain of the Bengali tune, rising and falling and taking breath at the pause before the final cadence, in order to fulfil the measure of a song, seemingly artless, but wildly complete. Out of such artlessness it is that the lyric art is born.

One is driven to insist on the part that music takes in the composition of these songs, because, unless their author is realised as a musician, one loses touch with the real spring of his verse. Indian music, however, is more naïve in its companionship with poetry than ours.

In his book of memoirs Rabindranath speaks of a paper on music which he read on the eve of his departure for England (he was then only seventeen years old), and his comments on it are illuminating:

"I tried to explain," he says, "that the real purpose of vocal music was by means of the tune to interpret and explain the words. . . . The written part of my paper was small; and almost from beginning to end I tried to maintain the agreement by singing the tunes that express different feelings. Well was I repaid when the chairman, old Reverend Krishna Mohan Bandhopadhyaya, said to me 'Hail, Valmiki nightingale!' This was, I think, because I was still very young, and his heart was melted by hearing all those songs sung in a childish treble. But the ideas I then expressed with so much pride I should now recognise to be false."

He goes on to speak of his first impressions of our music and of the singers he heard during that first visit to Europe:

In our country the first thought is of devotion to the song; in Europe the first object is the voice, and with the voice they perform miracles.

But the singing left him quite untouched:

Later, I managed to acquire some taste for European music, but I still feel the difference. European music is, so to speak, mixed with the actualities of life; . . .

our music moves above the incident of daily life, and because of that it is marked by apparent detachment and real tenderness.

Our songs speak of the early dawn and the starry midnight sky of India; our music breathes of dripping rain, and the wordless ecstasy of the new spring as it reaches the utmost depth of the forests. . . .

The art of music has its own nature and special function. . . . Song begins where words end; the inexpressible is the domain of music.

In Hindustani music the words are usually insignificant, but in Bengal the influence of words has been too strong for the independence of pure music. He continues:

I have felt this again and again when composing songs. When I began to write a line, humming—

Do not hide in your heart, O Sakhi, your secret words,

then I saw that wherever the tune flew away with the words, the words could not follow on foot. Then it seemed to me as if the hidden word that I prayed to hear was lost in the gloom of the forest, it melted into the still whiteness of the full moonlight, it was veiled in the blue distance of the horizon—as if it were the innermost secret word of the whole land and sea and sky.

I heard when I was very young the song, "Who dressed you like a foreigner?" and that one line of the song painted such a strange picture in my mind that . . . I once tried to compose a song myself under the spell of that line.

As I hummed the tune I wrote the first line of the song—"I know thee, thou Stranger"—and if there were no tune to it I don't know what meaning would be left in the song. But by the power of the spell (Mantra) of the tune the mysterious figure of that stranger was evoked in my mind. My heart began to say, "There is a stranger going to and fro in this world of ours—her house is on the further shores of an ocean of mystery—Sometimes she is to be seen in the Autumn morning, sometimes in the flowery midnight—Sometimes we receive an intimation of her in the depths of our heart—Sometimes I hear her voice when I turn my ear to the sky." The tune of my song led me to the very door of that stranger who ensnares the universe and appears in it, and I said:

> Wandering over the world,
> I come to thy land:
> I am a guest at thy door, thou Stranger.

Some days afterwards I heard some one singing along the road:

> How does that unknown bird fly to and from the cage?
> Could I but catch it, I would put the chain of my thoughts round its feet.

I saw that the Baul song said the same thing. At times the strange bird comes to the closed cage, and speaks a word of the limitless and the unknown. What but the tune of a song could express the coming and going of the strange bird?

These passages from the confession-book of the lyrist are very suggestive, when one can

still recall the haunting tunes to which he used occasionally to sing his songs when he was in this country. In listening to them, one was impressed by the evident power of their spell over the singer. They induced the mood, the atmosphere, the rhythmical life, which the song seemed to require.

If then we test these songs of *The Gardener* by the tests of the music and the imagination that have gone to their making, we find they maintain that sensation of things realised musically and that emotion tied to congenial rhythms and concrete forms, by which the lyric art is justified. In one night-song the anklets of the maiden who is supposed to be singing "grow loud at every step" as she passes between the silent houses in the street; and she grows ashamed. In the suspense, as she listens for her lover's feet, even the leaves no longer rustle on the tree, and the water grows still in the river, "like the sword on the knees of a sentry fallen asleep." And then when her lover joins her and she trembles and her eyelids droop, the night grows darker, "the wind blows out the lamp, and the clouds draw veils over the stars." Then—last, most effective note in the secret

rhyme of her hopes and fears, and her wonder at herself:

> It is the jewel at my own breast that shines and gives light. I do not know how to hide it.

Is that not finely conceived in the maiden grace and sympathy of the poet's understanding? Add only to it the spell of the Indian *raga*, and the wailing and elvish music in which the night wind and the darkness are suggested, and the lyric picture is complete.

The forms and the sounds of nature are always waiting in these songs, ready to quicken the love-interest. In the eleventh song occurs a cloud-motive: flocks of cranes fly up from the river-bank, and gusts of wind rush over the heath, and the cattle run to their stalls. In vain the maiden lights her lamp to do her hair and arrange her wreath; the wind blows it out. Who can know now that her eyelids have not been touched by lamp-black? "Your eyes are darker than rain-clouds," sings the lover; "Come as you are. . . . Who cares if your wreath is woven or not, or if your flower-chain is linked?" and again the cloud-motive is repeated: "The sky is overcast. Come as you are."

In the next page, the song of the lake, the

natural imagery again accentuates the love-theme:

> The shadow of the coming rain is on the sands, and the clouds hang low upon the blue lines of the trees like the heavy hair above your eyebrows.

Finally, we may say about *The Gardener* that, although there have been other Indian poets who have sung of love and mortal life, and others who have made hymns of divine adoration, none until he came was able to interpret in both kinds the spirit of the east to the people of the west. That is, in remembering India, he has not forgotten that his songs and their themes must be subject to the whole realm of art; and he has made their accent universal.

CHAPTER V

RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S SHORT STORIES

During the whole night long, Kathaka tales and Kirtana songs went on in the house.—*Autobiography of Devendranath Tagore.*

THERE are critics who know Rabindranath's writings intimately in their original form and say that his finest work lies, not in his songs or in his plays, but in his short stories. Only a few of them have been printed in English; but some were translated experimentally while their author was in London, and others may be had in versions printed from time to time by Mr. R. R. Sen and earlier translators. And though, judging by these alone, we might hesitate to accept the verdict of his Indian friends, as we read them we feel at once the touch of the born tale-teller, and remember then, perhaps, how inevitable is the tale-teller's figure in any symbolic cartoon of the east. But in this case we find that it is not the traditional tale-teller, reappearing with a modern difference, who offers us his wares. For while the tradition has un-

doubtedly helped him in his interpretation of Bengal life, there is a rarer savour in it altogether, a savour peculiar to the writer himself.

In Bengal the Kathakas and the ballad-singers still ply their calling as they used to do, and the story of Sita and her exiled lord is still being told and retold; but it is in realising the old mode that we begin to discover where the art of this new diviner of India and the woman's heart begins. Sita, it may be explained, is almost the type-figure of the Hindu wife; but she is also a folk-tale princess "whose tender feet covered with *alta* are wounded by thorns," whose eyes shed bitter tears. It needed a tale-teller who had listened in boyhood to such tales as hers told by the Kathakas, and who had then wandered from east to west and learnt the power and subtlety of the greatest historians of the heart, to become equal to the interpretation which he set himself to give to his own region. Sita in fact is merely a single clue; we must look further for the disentangling of the threads, new and old, intricately crossed in Rabindranath's Indian web.

In the art of the tales told by the Bengali village tale-tellers memory and improvisation

RABINDRANATH TAGORE.
From a photograph by John Trevor.

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hold a large share; and as compared with western fiction there is very much the same difference that we find in the treatment of the songs of east and west. But as Rabindranath has proved himself in other ways a close student of foreign literatures, so here he has known how to develop for his own use a sympathetic and thoroughly congenial form of short story. In it he combines, not hard and fast realism, but the human realities with his romance, and truth to nature attends his wildest apparent improvisations. He is able thus to gain effects which a Nathaniel Hawthorne or a Turgenief might envy him. Dr. Seal, perhaps the best-equipped critic he has had, has pointed out that his stories resemble most closely (if they are to be held like anything in European literature) the shorter tales of Flaubert. The finer art of the tale began in Bengal with the "Vaishnavas," who gave the Indian tale, or *Katha*, a more finished form; from them Rabindranath took it over, and made of it a pliable or adaptable instrument.

Those tales of his which have appeared in the pages of the *Wednesday Review*, the *Hindostan Review*, and other Indian periodicals form only a small contingent of the number he has

told; but they are enough to show how fine a medium he attained. The scenes of Indian country life which they contain—sketched by him when he was acting as steward of the family estates on the Ganges—grow as intimate and real in his telling as those familiar in our every-day English fiction.

It is remarkable too how often the story is directed to showing the devotion and the heroism of the Hindu wife or woman. In one which he calls "The Ghât" he makes the river-stair itself turn narrator; and its reminiscences culminate in the fate of the girl Kusum. The opening discovers the instinctive sense of place and the affectionate regard for his neighbourhood that inspire the narrator. No western writer, not even Turgenief in his *Note-Book of a Sportsman*, or George Sand in *La Mare au Diable*, is better able to call up the illusion and the aroma of a scene in the printed page. But perhaps if a comparison be needed, we may turn first, as Dr. Seal suggests, to Flaubert and his account of Félicité in "The Simple Heart" (*Trois Contes*, 1879). Of the two, Flaubert is more sure and artistically exact; Tagore more imaginative, more suggestive of the moods and hidden

spirits of the creatures and places he evokes with the tale-writer's talisman.

It is the month of Aswin, September, when the story of the Ghât opens. The soft light breath of the early winter's morning air instils new life into men waking from sleep and into the leaves on the trees. The river is high: we see the water rising, till all but four steps of the Ghât are covered, while three old heaps of bricks are made into islands. The fishing boats float up with the rising tide; and the water in its irresponsible gaiety rocks them, splashing on both sides of them. "It shook their ears," says the Ghât, "as if in sheer pleasantry." On the banks the ripe sunshine lies with a delicious yellow colour, like the champak flower, such as it has at no other time of year. The boatmen seize their boats with shouts of "Ram, Ram," and set sail on the flood. A Brahmin comes down to bathe and women come to fetch water. Gradually the Ghât's memories individualise in a single figure—that of the young girl Kusum. When at dawn a small thrush stirred on its nest in a hole of the bricks, and after shaking its tail-feathers flew off piping, that was the signal for Kusum to appear. "When her shadow

fell on the water I felt a longing to hold it fast in my stones," says the Ghât; "such rare loveliness it had." And when her anklets clinked the weeds and ferns were delighted. As for the river—there was some peculiar understanding between her heart and its tide. She loved the water like another self. But a day came when Kusum did not appear at the water-side, and her playmates did not ring changes on her name—Kusi, Rakkusi, Khushi. The Ghât understood from them that she had become a child-bride and been taken away to her father-in-law's house, as the custom is. There was no Ganges there; the people were strangers, and everything was strange—the houses, the very road before the door, everything. It was as if they had taken a water-lotus and tried to make it grow on dry land. A year went, and Kusum returned, still a mere child, but a widow. Her old playmates were gone; but when she sat crouched down on the steps of the Ghât, her knees up to her chin, it seemed to her that the river-ripples held up girlish hands and called to her, *Kusi, Rakkusi!*

Time went on—eight, ten years, and the full beauty of youth and young womanhood

came to her. But the Ghât and the folk who frequented it still thought of Kusum as a child. Then, one year, a wandering Sanyasi, a tall young ascetic with a radiant face and a form of great beauty, came to the river, and entered the temple of Siva by the Ghât. Through that shining emissary of the regions promised in the *Bhagavadgita* Kusum was to discern what love and death meant. When he held forth she listened with wonder. She went every day to touch the dust of his feet,—it became her service to gather flowers for the temple and wash its floor with water from the river. But after a time she gives up her pious office and disappears; and when she returns, and the Sanyasi reproaches her, it is clear from her confused replies that her life has become centred in him, and he has become the image of her dreams day and night. Thereupon he says he has one more word to give her: "I leave here to-night, and you must forget me: promise me that!" And she promises and he goes.

Last of all, we see her stand looking at the river, the Ganges, her one friend. "If it were not to take her in its lap now in her trouble, who would?" . . . The Ghât ends the tale:

The moon sank, the night grew dark; I heard the rush of the water, and saw nothing beside. But the wind blew hard as if it were trying to blow out the stars in heaven, for fear their light should show the least glimpse of anything on earth. My playmate, who had played so long on my stony knees, slipped away—I could not tell where.

In this story Rabindranath Tagore reveals the heart of Kusum by the slight interrogative touches which he often uses to give reality to his spiritual portraits of women. He is one of the very few tale-writers who can interpret women by intuitive art. The devotion and the heroism of the Hindu wife he paints are of a kind to explain to us that though the mortal rite of Suttee is ended, the spirit that led to it is not at all extinct. It lives re-embodied in a thousand acts of sacrifice, and in many a delivering up of the creature-self, and its pride of life and womanly desire.

Such a tale of the slow Suttee is told by Rabindranath in "The Expiation," in which the little Bengali wife of a splendid drone and do-nothing takes on her own head his guilt, when he turns thief in order to get money to go to England. While he lives there and casually picks up an English wife she pawns and sells her jewels to

support him. What the wife Bindhya does in this apologue is only the sacrifice and self-annihilation of the funeral pyre in another form. In the tale of another more attractive kind of parasite—Rasik, the fond brother—Bansi shows the same extraordinary devotion; and Souravi, who loves Rasik, is a companion portrait worthy to set by Bindhya's.

There you have only one motive out of many dealt with in these tales of Bengal. Among the creators of the fantasy of place there are few who can call up as he does by direct and indirect touches the illusion of a scene. He is particularly skilful in working the charm by means of an agent of romance, youth or maid, man or woman, who is at odds with ordinary good fortune, yet at one with the given environment.

In the story of the "Auspicious Look"—that is the look given by a bridegroom to his bride at the customary wedding-rite—there is a savour of childish mystery about the girl who is the signal figure. She is very beautiful, and, like the figure of Kusum in the story of the Ghât, her charm is used to evoke the spirit of a river-side scene. She comes to the water with two ducklings pressed to her bosom with both her hands;

she wishes to let them go in the water, and yet she is afraid they will stray out of her reach, and as she stoops, with the river-side grass glistening bright at her feet and the morning light playing upon her form, the dramatic moment arrives when Kanti, the hero of the tale, catches sight of her. "The girl's beauty was extremely fresh, as if the artificer of the world had just set her down after modelling her. It was hard to tell her age; her form was womanly, yet her face had a childish immaturity that no experience of the world seemed even to have touched. The news of her crossing the mysterious confines between childhood and youth did not yet seem to have reached her own consciousness."

The vision brings the life of Kanti, as it does the day itself, to a climax. He goes to her father with the abruptness that one often finds in romance, and makes formal proposals for the girl with the ducklings; and the father, who is a Brahmin, says he will gladly see his daughter—whom he names Shudha—betrothed, as she is growing in years. All goes on well until the wedding-day. In India, we must remember, bride and bridegroom do not actually meet until the day when the exchange of the "look auspi-

cious," which is in reality the sealing of the covenant, passes between the two. But when the revelation comes and Kanti is able to look on the bent and veiled head of his bride, he sees it is not the girl of the ducklings at all. It is in fact her elder sister.

At this moment when he and the bride are seated together after the lifting of the bridal veil, and he tries to reconcile himself to the situation and bear without resentment the gaieties of the bridal chamber, there is a stir among the guests, and the bride starts up from his side with a cry of alarm. A pet leveret runs across the floor, followed by the girl of the ducklings, who catches it and presses it to her cheek as she caresses it.

"That's the mad girl," the people whisper to each other, and the servants try to take her from the room. She pays no heed, however, and sits herself down before the bridal pair, scanning them with childlike curiosity. Thereupon Kanti asks her her name: she does not answer, only rocks her body to and fro, while some of the guests break out into laughter. Another question, in which he asks after her ducklings, is again without effect, save that the

girl looks up gravely into his face. There let us leave the mystery, which readers can solve for themselves when the book of these stories is added to the writer's other English books. But the figure of the young girl, as she first appears at the water-side, or as she sits afterwards with the leveret in her arms looking up and wondering, lives still as the veritable spirit of the place where she is seen. Rasik is only the agent of her unapproachable maidenhood; the indicator of the mystery.

In the story of another child of nature, "Sweet Tongue"—so called before she is discovered to be dumb—we have for setting another water-side village. The village is Chandipur, and the stream is for Bengal a small one; "rather like a slender girl in a household of sturdy country folk." Nature seemed to wish to lend the silent girl a voice, the lapping of the water, the trilling of birds, the rustling of leaves, join themselves to the voices of the crowd and the boatmen's songs, and all mingle together with the constant movements and agitation of Nature, and break, as it seems, like the surf on the sea-beach, in her ever-silent breast. In such tales Rabindranath confesses, as he does in his songs,

his belief in the identity of nature and man, of nature and supernature.

So far the tales described have been virtually of everyday life in Bengal. But one remains among Mr. Ranjan Sen's versions, "The Hungry Stones," which shows a truly uncanny power in romance. In it the place-interest centres in a dead and deserted palace of white marble, very stately in its Persian courts and galleries, standing above a Ghât or river-stair in Hyderabad. It had been built two centuries and a half earlier by the Shah Mahamed II., and long abandoned. Then a cotton-toll agent or collector takes up his abode there, a creature of uncommon tastes in his way, and given to look for wonders in his experience; and it is he who tells the tale, though in no more romance-befitting a place than the waiting-room at a railway station.

He is first made aware of something unusual when he has taken a chair down to the lowest step of the long palace stairs one evening to sit by the water. He notices "the dense sweet aroma of mint, anise, and wild basil" that floats down from the neighbouring hills. The sun goes; a tall drop-scene of deep shadow falls on

the last of the day's pageant; and he starts up with the intention of a ride in the cool evening, when he hears footsteps. He looks up, and sees nobody; and goes back to his seat. But more, and yet more, footfalls sound as if a whole troop of girls, merry and light-footed, are running down to the river to bathe. And next, although the stream remains still, it is certain that the bathers are swimming there and ruffling the water, and throwing up the spray like handfuls of pearls. Next day when he returns from his office work and goes upstairs to the lonely state chambers at twilight he is aware of a tumult within, as if a great assembly had just broken up. The drip of the water in the fountain resolves itself into the clink of golden ornaments, the tinkle of anklets, the peal of great copper bells and other earthly and festive music.

That night he sleeps in a small room that adjoins the other, and he is visited by the apparition of one of these old palace dwellers—an Arab maid with firm well-rounded arms that seem hard as marble below her ample sleeves. A filmy piece of stuff that hangs from a corner of her cap hides her face; a curved dagger is

at her waist. She leads him on, through wide porticoes and narrow passages, wide state-rooms and cupboard-like chambers, till they come to a dark blue screen at the entrance to one room. She points significantly with tell-tale fingers to the foot of the screen, and he knows that behind it sits a fierce African Eunuch dressed in kincob, a naked scimitar upon his knees, swaying himself to and fro.

We cannot follow the dream-tale through all its mazes. The Iranian slave-girl becomes the cotton-clerk's nightly visitant; and every night her mysterious call and his wanderings begin afresh, till at last she seems to be half materialised in the day too. She would appear by lamplight, seen first in a tall mirror which reflected the splendour of a Shahzada, the gleam of a bronze neck, the melancholy glance of two large dark eyes; while a hinting, a mere tinge of unuttered speech, seemed to hang on her lips. But then, just as she turned to lean towards him, her form swaying like the slender stem of a creeper, she would melt away in the mirror. With a scattering of sparks the bright gleams of her jewels, and the broken glimpses of her smile, her pity and longing and unknown trouble, were

alike consumed. What wonder that the dreamer of the vision calls aloud in his invocation:

> O Beauty celestial, in the lap of what creature of the desert, on the bank of what cool fountain under the date-palms, did you take your birth? What fierce Bedouin tore you from your mother's breasts like a bud from a flowering tree, and rode away with you on a horse, lightning-footed, across the burning sands? . . .

The refrain of Meher Ali, the mad old fellow who haunts the palace ruins, "Keep away, keep away! all false, all false!" sends at last the bewildered cotton-surveyor to ask the permanent clerk at the office what it can all mean? But the old clerk can only affirm again that they who enter the palace do so at their peril. Its hungry stones, fired by the measureless lusts and ungratified desires of those who once lived in the palace, seek like a demon for a living man to devour. Old Meher Ali alone has escaped after the three fatal nights required to work their spells; and even he did so at the cost of his senses. Hence his ominous cry: "Keep away, all false, keep away!"

Now, when we think of places on which romance has breathed the spell of a past crowded with apparitions and filled with half-realisable

memories—places like Villiers de L'Isle-Adam's hall in *Axel*, Balzac's Flemish house of mystery, Scott's "House of Lammermoor," Edgar Poe's "House of Usher," or Childe Roland's "Dark Tower"—we shall feel tempted, after reading the story of "The Hungry Stones," to add the Palace of Barich to their number.

Rabindranath Tagore indeed is a place-charmer in his tales. For him, houses have souls, old ruins may be powerful as witches in their sorcery, a river-stair can count the footfalls of ages, and a door can remember its dead.

This is only part of his tale-teller's equipment; for he is very tender to his human folk, especially to his women of sorrow and children, and, what is perhaps his favourite among them all, the child of nature—what the Bengali calls sometimes a "mad Chandi," a possessed one, with a certain tenderness as for a creature held by a spirit beyond the common. His page often tells of the unconscious creature that is very near the sources of nature, drinking her clear dew and becoming one with her in her play of life and death.

His stories, finally, if we can judge by the imperfect English versions we have, are written

in a style of their own, here and there reminding one a little of Hawthorne in his most elusive vein, or Turgenief in his romantic tales. It is as if a folk-tale method were elaborated with literary art, inclining to the imaginative side of everyday life, yet dwelling fondly on the human folk it portrayed.

CHAPTER VI

THE BABE'S PARADISE

> Besides, the childhood of the day has kept,
> Against you come, some Orient pearls unwept.

THE imagination of the poet is very near the child's. In the Indian Vaishnava song, which is not meant for children at all, you often find touches of their fantasy, recalling the way in which they surprise the young god in their midst, or find the wonder of the world in the dust at their feet. Such is the cry of the shepherd-boys in one song, often quoted, who find they have been playing with Krishna and treating him as a common school-fellow:

> "Why, think how often we quarrelled with you and called you names; how often we rode on your shoulders, and you on ours; how often we ate up the best pieces and only gave you the crumbs! Did you take these things to heart then and run away?"

You have only to reverse the magic lens in order that the grown-up man or woman may look at the child with the same wonder and sense of new discovery. Its ways are at once

so innocent and mysterious, so foolish and wise, so preposterous and lovable. It is this age's reversal that explains *The Crescent Moon*, so far as the book needs anything to reveal its midday moonshine. Some of us may have expected more patent wonders, remembering those in the Indian story of the Jat and the Bania, where the Bania looks into the mouth of the mosquito that is going to bite him and sees there a palace of burning gold, and a lovely princess sitting at one of its many windows. With this idea we may have counted on a crescent moon of pure magic, and a moony world of arabesque extravagance; but in fact Rabindranath Tagore, like a true conjurer, works his enchantment with simple means: a little dust, a puddle of water, a flower, some ink and paper.

The poems in *The Crescent Moon* carry us very near this everyday Paradise, simply by showing a regard, at once joyous and tender, for the changing moods and wayward desires of a child. The book is delightful to us alike for the fantasy of its oriental background and for its writer's sympathy; every page of it gives us a picture touched in with the fond life-like detail of a child-lover.

We see the small boy sit at the window to watch how the shadow of the banyan tree wriggles on the disturbed water when the women come to fill their jars at the pond. We see the child taking his father's books to scribble in, or writing-paper to make boats with; and how he watches the evening come and the old fisher-woman gather herbs for her supper by the side of the pond, or the watchman swing his lantern and walk with the shadow at his side. The pictures of a child gathering golden *champa* flowers that drop on the forest path, dancing on the sea-shore, or sitting in the dust to play with a broken twig and his own fancies, are succeeded by another of the crying urchin whose fingers and face are both tear-stained and ink-stained. To appreciate the last poem to the full, we need to know something of the custom of Indian school-children. In that true, if apparently fictive, history of a Bengal Raiyat, "Govinda Sámanta," which traces the career of its hero from childhood up, we are told that he always returned home from school with his hands, face, and garment bespattered with ink; for whenever he wrote on the palm-leaf and made a wrong letter or formed one amiss, he

would immediately brush it off with his hand or his wrist. In Rabindranath's writings you find infinite sympathy with the babe in trouble and the small boy at odds with authority. He understands the appetite of the growing thing and the greedy lips of the babe. He ends this very poem with one of the naïve recoils in which he often indulges in his verse. In this case the foibles of the elders are brought into range with the innocent iniquities of the children.

"Everybody knows," he cries to the child at odds, "how you love sweet things—is that why they call you greedy? . . . What then," he continues, "what then would they call us who love you?" The irony of this question is not fully seen until one detects that by it the filiolater is unmasked in his own love for the sweetness of the little rascal.

Again, in the song "When and Why" there is another reading of the babe's litany and the eternal philosophy of appetite and desire and delight. For, says the poet:

> When I bring sweet things to your greedy hands, I know why there is honey in the cup of the flower, and why fruits are secretly filled with sweet juice;—when I bring sweet things to your greedy hands,

In his story of the fruit-seller, in one of his prose-books, which reads very like a chapter directly out of his own experience, we have a small daughter of the writer himself, Mini, as the chief figure. Her childish desires, her mischief, and her drollery are contrasted with the tall form of the Kabuli hawker or fruit-seller who brings grapes and raisins and apricots to the door. The sack which he carries is like Fortunatus's purse, a wonder-worker; to the child's mind it is mysterious and inexhaustible; and it becomes the Kabuli's joke, when Mini asks him what there is inside it, to reply that it contains an elephant.

My house stood by the road-side. Mini ran to the window and began shouting at the top of her voice, "Kabuli, Ho! Kabuli!"

Clad in loose dirty attire, with a goodly turban on his head and sacks hanging from his shoulders, a tall Kabuli was travelling slowly along the road with some baskets of grapes in his hand.

A few days after I found my daughter sitting on the bench near the door and chattering away without pause to the Kabuli who sat at her feet, smiling and listening. I noticed that the corner of her little *sari* was full of almonds and raisins.

Such was the beginning of the friendship between the queerly assorted pair, a friendship

cemented by continual sweetmeats. The father of Mini also makes friends with the Kabuli.

My morning conversations with Rahamat sitting before the table in my little study had for me to some extent the effect of travel. High unscaleable and inaccessible chains of hills of a burnt red hue on either side, a slender arid pathway between, lines of loaded camels pacing onwards, turbaned merchants, wayfarers on camels and on foot, some carrying lances and others the old-fashioned flint matchlocks,—this panorama would unroll and pass before my eyes as the Kabuli talked about his motherland in his deep rumbling voice and his stammering Bengali.

In the end Rahamat kills a man, and is sentenced to eight years' imprisonment. When he reappears, it is on Mini's wedding-day.

I did not recognise him at first. He had not his sacks nor his long hair nor his fine spirited bearing. At last I remembered his smile.

"Hullo! Rahamat, when did you come?" I said.

"Yesterday I came out of jail," he answered.

I told him I was very busy and that he had better go. Then he said as he stood and shuffled by the door:

"May I not see the child once more?"

But this was not to be, and with a dumb troubled look the man went away. He returned, however, and coming near, said:

"I have brought these grapes and almonds and raisins for the child. Give them to her from me, I pray? No,

you must not pay me for them. Just as you have a daughter, so have I one at home; and it is in remembrance of her little face that I bring some fruit for your child. I do not come to sell it. . . ."

Saying this he thrust his hand into the folds of his loose ample cloak and brought out a piece of dirty paper from somewhere near his breast. With great care he opened the folds and spread it out upon my table.

I saw an imprint of a tiny palm upon the paper, a simple mark got by smearing the hand in lampblack. With this strange token of the child placed in his bosom Rahamat had come to sell fruit in Calcutta streets, as if the touch of the child's hand soothed the heart that was torn by the pangs of separation.

The "Babe's Pageant," one of the earlier poems of the *Crescent Moon*, again calls up the story of Govinda. His mother teaches Govin to walk to the sound of the doggerel verse:

Chali, chali, pá, pá!
(Walk, walk, step by step.)

Presently the child walks or wriggles until he falls into the tank in the yard of the house, and is saved by good luck. At a later stage he is saved from the wrath of the Five-faced Pancho or Pancharana, one of the gods, another form of "the all-destroying Siva." Govin in fact had offended him, and a fit was the consequence. Happily Alanza, the boy's grandmother, knows

out of her long experience what is to be done to propitiate the deity, as in another page we saw how the birth-god wrote the words of fate on the babe's forehead.

The secret of Rabindranath's understanding of the child lies very near the secret of his whole art as a poet. In his poetry he brings the innocence of a child's mind to play upon life, love and death, and the phenomena of nature. He knows that the figurative delight of the child points the mode of representing the wonder of the earth that philosophy finds it so hard to reduce to order.

How figurative, how concrete, the Indian mode has always tended to be we can learn by turning up a page of the Upanishads.[1] The father, in teaching the boy how to get at the subtile essence of the greater self, tells him to bring the fruit of the Nyagrodha tree:

"Here is one, sir," says the child.
"Break it."
"It is broken, sir."
"What do you see there?"
"These seeds, almost infinitesimal."
"Break one of them."

[1] 12th Khanda, *Khandogya Upanishad.*

"It is broken, sir."

"What do you see there?"

"Not anything, sir."

The father said: "My son, that subtile essence which you do not perceive there, of that very essence this great Nyagrodha tree exists.

"Believe it, my son. That which is the subtile essence, in it all that exists has its self. It is the True. It is the Self, and thou, O Svetaketu, art it."

In many pages of this Moon-book we have the clear hints of the reality that underlies the child's half-comprehended belief in the nearness of Paradise and its identity with earth. The longing for the moon and the cloud-horses of the sky, or for the enchanted country depicted at night by the shadows of the lantern, is a clue to the child's faith.

Herbert Spencer saw in the appetites of the child only the insatiable hunger of the beast-innate at a lower stage. Rabindranath Tagore has learnt to divine in them the first putting forth of the desires which, being repeated in the other plane of intelligence, seek out the path to heaven itself. The signs indeed are clearly to be read in certain poems, and in that entitled "Benediction" they are given the effect of so many direct intimations:

Bless this little heart, this white soul that has won the kiss of heaven for our earth.

He loves the light of the sun, he loves the sight of his mother's face.

He has not learned to despise the dust and hanker after gold.

Clasp him to your heart and bless him.

He has come into this land of an hundred cross-roads.

I know not how he chose you from the crowd, came to your door, and grasped your hand to ask his way.

He will follow you, laughing, and talking, and not a doubt in his heart.

Keep his trust, lead him straight and bless him.

In the story of "The Trespass" two boys, the trespassers, dare one another to seal *madhavi* flowers from the court of a temple. The temple is owned by Jaikali, a widow, and in the end an unclean spirit in the shape of a pig breaks into the court where one of the boys, Nalin, has been imprisoned. The priest drives out the pig and Jaikali punishes the boy for his desecration.

Let those who will shake their heads over the superstition of Jaikali. Rabindranath Tagore learnt in the house of his father, the Maharshi, to turn away in his religion from that old idolatry. But in his poetry he is true to the Vaishnava tradition, whose poets brought new life to their art by turning to the folk-life

and folk-speech of Bengal. He has, in truth, known how to see the child with the mother's eyes and the mother with the child's; he has learnt to make a heaven with the scent of a *champa* flower and a little dust.

CHAPTER VII

THE PLAYWRIGHT

CONSTABLE.—Who are you making an uproar here at this late hour of the night?

STAGE MANAGER.—We are jatrawalas (actors), and who, pray, are you?

WHEN living in Calcutta a boy of fourteen or fifteen, Rabindranath wrote a play for an amateur dramatic company in that city and acted in it himself; and since then he must have written fully a score in all, of which the best known in India have not yet been translated into English. *Chitra*, *The King of the Dark Chamber*, and *The Post Office* are however available now; and the two last have been produced by the Irish Players in Dublin and at the Court Theatre in London, with perhaps as near a bid at the Indian stage illusion as one can hope to get under the circumstances. Another play associated with his name and referred to in an earlier page, *The Maharani of Arakan*, was not of his own writing, but adapted by Mr. Calderon from one of his stories. Judged by a London stand-

ard, it may seem that all his dramatic work is lacking in ordinary stage effect, but to this criticism one can only reply that his plays were written to attain a naturalness of style and a simplicity of mode which only Irish players have so far realised for us. In many cases they have been written to be acted in the open air by a company of boys, without scenery or any elaborate fittings, and this too has affected the form into which they are thrown. Beyond this it is with the Indian drama as with the song; it tends, as *Shakuntala* may tell, to a fluidity of movement, with no attempt at what we may call a dramatic pattern in the play. There is no bid for a curtain, no holding up of the moment of suspense, in order to force a sensation.

A page of a Hindoo travel-book by the late Sholanauth Chunder may be borrowed to show what kind of theatre it was that Rabindranath had to count upon at home when he began his play-writing. The scene was the courtyard of a Brindabun shrine, which recalls the old galleried innyards such as the house at Southwark, where Elizabethan plays were acted.

> The courtyard had been hung over with a rich awning. Hundreds of lamps burned on all sides to illuminate the

scene. The ample space was thronged by a picturesque audience of turbaned Vrijbashees squatting on the floor. The Vrijmaeës in parti-coloured dresses sat beneath the cloisters. In the centre of the square was a raised dais, on each side of which stood boys in livery, holding two torches in the true Hindoo mode. . . .

The play had for theme the time-honoured divine intrigue of Radha and Krishna, relieved apparently by moments of boisterous low comedy:

High on the dais sat a lovely boy in superb female garb, but with a coronet on his head—personating the heroine. The other principal actor on the stage was Krishna, as a page; the performance struck as something novel—midway between an English play and an uproarious Bengalee Jatra. The play was lyrical in effect, as most Indian plays are, or were. The singers—deep modulated male voices or clear boyish trebles—were accompanied by cymbal or tabor, and sometimes by the murali or flute. There was harmony too in the dialogue, we are told; and it was a great pleasure to hear Krishna speak in melodious Vrij-buli—the language most probably of the ancient Yadas. Radha had an arch smile on her face, and Krishna a penitential visage.

Possibly Krishna's sad mien affected the playgoers, for we read that at the close the spectators sat silent, and burst forth in no plaudits or cries of *Hurryboke!* The writer ends his account

by speaking of the movement for an improved Hindoo theatre at Calcutta. When Chunder wrote, Rabindranath was only a boy of eight; another six or seven years and he was already helping in the movement for a new theatre. We need hardly exclaim over the taking of feminine parts and the chief parts too in a piece, by boys as being at all strange, when we remember how our own theatre for long followed the same custom. On the unadorned stage at Shanti Niketan the boys of the school take the most exacting parts, needing both mimetic and vocal skill, with great spirit and without awkwardness; and at Bradfield College we have seen the same practice maintained admirably in Greek drama.

Of the two plays acted over here, *The Post Office* (*Dakghar* in the original) and *The King of the Dark Chamber*, I saw the first when it was produced at the Court Theatre, with Synge's mordant comedy, *The Well of the Saints*, as an incongruous companion-piece. The story of *The Post Office* turns upon the longing of a small boy who is a prisoner, unable to be moved from the village hut, where sickness holds him fast. He is hope's most pitiful pensioner, living in a

remote village that has hardly been heard of, and he has for his solace been led to believe that the King himself is sending him a letter. Here, you may think, is a slender thread by which to move the pulleys. But as it was acted, even with the drawback of having a partly Irish, instead of an Indian, characterisation of its village humours, it proved moving and particularly effective in the stroke of tragedy redeemed at the close. The pathos would have been too much for a stage-idyll, except that imagination saved it, and that in the Indian order death is so often not catastrophe at all, but a blessed escape.

The story of the boy, Amal, is clear as folk-tale, up to the point where the King's letter and the chief motive grow, or seem to be growing, too significant for mere tale-telling, and need the dramatic emphasis. The boy sits at his window, from which every one who passes is seen like a messenger of the world's affairs and the day's events denied to him. The villagers—the Curd-seller, the Watchman, the little Flower-girl Sudha who reminds one ever so slightly of Browning's Pippa in *Pippa Passes*, the Gaffer, the Village Headman who is the village bully—

they go by in a pageant of health and pleasure before the sick boy Amal's eyes. The Curd-seller calls up the picture of his hill village, and Amal imitates his cry:

"Curds, curds, fine curds!" from the dairy village—from the country of the Panch-mura hills by the Shamli bank. "Curds, good curds!" In the early morning the women make the cows stand in a row under the trees and milk them, and in the evening they turn the milk into curds. "Curds, good curds!" Hello, there's the watchman on his rounds. Watchman, I say, come and have a word with me.

It is the Watchman who tells him of the Post Office, in the new big house over the way, which the boy has seen with its flag flying, and the people always going in and out. "One fine day," he tells Amal, "there may be a letter for you in there"; and with the promise of the King's letter, and the promise of the flower of Sudha the little Flower-girl, who will bring him one on her return, the hope of Amal is sealed. The Curd-seller has already left a jar of curds, and promised a child-wedding with his niece. He told me, says Amal, that in the morning "she would milk with her own hands the black cow and feed me with warm milk with foam on it from a brand new earthen cruse; and in the

evenings she would carry the lamp round the cow-house, and then come and sit by me to tell me tales of Champa and his six brothers." The two voices of the elders that repress or enlarge the child's mind, and give him the idea that the day holds its gifts for the smallest pensioner of time, are represented by the Village Headman and the Gaffer. The one sneers at the boy: the other dilates on the pleasures—the flowers, the open road, the fakir's free path by sea or forest or mountain, the wonders of the Post Office—that wait to be discovered.

However, in taking up the chronicle at the point where *The Post Office* was written—its exact date is not mentioned in our miniature biography—we are neglecting the early work which serves to define its author's position in the neo-romantic movement of Bengal. This is the remarkable play, *Nature's Revenge*, whose Indian title is *Prakritira Pratisodha*, a notable outcome of the revival whose stormy hopes and fears it helps to explain. While in advance of the negative criticism of life expressed in that Bengali *Werther*—the *Udvranta Prema*—it is in itself another confession-book of egoism. The protagonist of the play is a Sanyasi—master

of a grotesque humour which vents itself on nature and man alike. Like Paracelsus, he seeks to transcend human wisdom, wrest the very secret of the divine, and attain the pathway of perfection. In both there is the same isolation, the same pride of intellect, and contempt for ordinary men. In both, the supremacy of love over knowledge or contemplation is proved at the end. But in Paracelsus there is a nobler ideal: the godlike knowledge he seeks is not for himself, but "to elevate the race at once." The Sanyasi's desire is more egoistic. Paracelsus, dying, thinks of the race of his fellow-beings and their deliverance; the Sanyasi struggles with only the one affection, evoked by "a lovely child of nature" that stirs his fatherly instinct. It is an individual emotion, and the solace it looks for is a medicine for the creature-self and the defrauded and mortified ego.

In *Nature's Revenge*, then, we have apparently the first sign of its writer's second development, in which he advanced out of the stage of youthful desire and entered upon "the fair field full of folk" and those aspects of life to express which a poet must seek dramatic as well as lyric modes of art.

Compared with *Prakritira Pratisodha*, *Chitra* is like a piece of sculpture set beside a sombre strangely-coloured painting. *Chitra* is in effect a lyric drama, based on the story of a king's daughter of that name told in *Mahabarata*. Chitra's father has no son, and he has trained his daughter not as a girl, but as a boy, and made her his heir. In the opening scene we find her conferring with the two gods, Madana (who is Eros) and Vasanta (who is Lycoris). She tells them how one day when wandering along the river-bank on the track of a deer, she came on a man lying under the trees on a bed of dried leaves. This proved to be Arjuna, the hero of his great race, who had long been the idol of her dreams. She knew that he had vowed to live a hermit's life for twelve years, and she had often wished, as a warrior-maiden, to meet him in her male disguise and challenge him to single combat. But now at sight of him she is overtaken, as it were, by "a whirl-wind of thought"; she stands without a word of greeting or courtesy as he walks away. Next morning she lays aside her man's clothing and puts on bracelets and anklets and a gown of purple-red silk and a waist-chain, and, with

a shrinking at her heart, hastens to seek Arjuna in the forest temple of Shiva. There he reminds her of his vow; hence it is that in despair of winning his love, she turns to the God of Love. Madana promises to bring the world-conquering Arjuna to her feet; and she craves from Vasanta, god of youth, one day of perfect womanly grace in which she shall lose her plain looks and boyish features.

"For a single day," she says, "make me superbly beautiful. . . . Give me one brief day of perfect beauty."

There is the transcendent note that is never far away in this imaginer's music. Compare the unfolding of the love idyll that follows with the stern drama of love's scourging, told in *The King of the Dark Chamber*. In both the supernal powers come into play across the desires of men and women who think to win love, and find it bound by immutable law. In both a motive of fate, in the quest of supernal beauty and loveliness, is used to evoke the central idea of the drama. But in one the woman craves beauty for herself; in the other her desire is to find it in the forbidding face and the dark chamber of her dreadful lord and king.

One passage from the latter play, where the truth begins to penetrate the Queen's simplicity, will indicate the death motive:

Sudarshana

How can you say that I shall be unable to bear your sight? Oh, I can feel even in this dark how lovely and wonderful you are: why should I be afraid of you in the light? But tell me, can you see me in the dark?

King

Yes, I can.

Sudarshana

What do you see?

King

I see that the darkness of the infinite heavens, whirled into life and being by the power of my love, has drawn the light of a myriad stars into itself, and incarnated itself in a form of flesh and blood. . . .

She cannot understand the mystery of the darkness that is not dark to the vision of this inscrutable lord of love and life-in-death. It is equally wonderful that he can see in her, Sudarshana, what he does. She asks him if she is really as he says—"so wonderful, so beautiful"—for she cannot find these qualities in herself. The King replies that not even her own mirror can reflect them. "Could you only

see yourself," he says, "mirrored in my own mind." She begs him, then, to show her how to see with his eyes: "Is there nothing at all like darkness to you? This darkness—'which is to me real as death'—is it nothing to you? I want to see you where I see trees and animals, birds and stones, and the earth. . . ." The King says she may look for him from the palace turret among the crowd this very night, during the festival of the full moon of the spring. The song of the revellers and festive singing boys in the next scene fills Sudarshana with apprehension; she dreams of love unfulfillable and unrequited:

> My sorrow is sweet to me in this spring night.
> My pain smiles at the chords of my love and softly sings.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> The smells from the depths of the woodland have lost their way in my dreams.
> Words come in whispers to my ears, I know not from where.

And she says as the song ends, "A fancy comes to me that desire can never attain its object—it need never attain it."

She learns the truth that love is stern and based on the unalterable law, from Surangama, who has been the King's servant, and who is

the interpreter of the Dark Chamber; a chorus-damsel who sings in sharp antiphon to the common chorus of secular kings and king-worshippers:

Surangama

Every one knows that the King is hard and pitiless—no one has ever been able to move him.

Sudarshana

Why do you, then, call on him day and night?

To which Surangama answers, "May he ever remain hard and relentless." Her temper is like that of the singer who delights in the fierceness of the Maruts and sings the hymn of their coming:

Come hither, Maruts, on your chariots charged with lightning, resounding with beautiful songs, stored with spears, and winged with horses! Fly to us like birds bringing food, you mighty ones!

They come gloriously on their red or their tawny horses which hasten their chariots. He who holds the axe is brilliant like gold—with the tyre of the chariot they have struck the earth.

On your bodies there are daggers for beauty; may they stir up our minds as they stir up the forests.

The motive worked out in the dramatic parable of the Dark Chamber is one that bears significantly, as we shall see when we turn to

Sādhanā, on that idea of the deliverance from the circle of imperfections and the lower sense, which is behind the whole doctrine of Brahma. It is one of the elements in Rabindranath's poetry, whether dramatic or lyric in form, which help to make his pages more humanly interesting—that he expresses there so freely the ideal history of his own spiritual pilgrimage. He is the tenderest of lovers, the fondest idolater of a small child, the happiest dreamer, that ever walked under the moon: yet he is a stoic who knows very well what the terrors of Siva mean, and what exceeding darkness that is in the sun, on which its bright light rests. But when a man writes the drama of himself, he always tends to be lyrical; and both in *Chitra* and *The King of the Dark Chamber* the play does seem to be looking at every turn for its lyric moment and for a solution which transcends the common office of the stage.

The dramatic critics have complained over this tendency in Indian playwrights, as if in great drama, in Æschylus, in Sophocles, in Shakespeare, in Goethe's *Faust*, there was not any attempt to find lyrical alleviation on the road to the dramatic climax. Moreover, the

east has fostered a drama of its own, congenially influenced by the musical affinity of its themes. It does not, like our English stage, look for the comedy of differences or the sheer tragedy of circumstance. The old-style Indian playwright set out with a clear subject—say, the pursuit of beauty by the ordained lover, or the quest of the Golden Stag. There might be a few comic episodes by the way, but they were only for relief, a diversion, not a development, of the real argument. We have to reckon both with the tradition of a stage, as well as the temperament of a playwright in judging a kind of drama so new to us. Rabindranath Tagore may break the rules of our common stage-practice, but he breaks none that govern the leisurely drama of the open air and the courtyard, which he and his fellow-playwrights in India have in mind.

CHAPTER VIII

"GITANJALI" AND CHAITANYA DEVA

That sky there above us, O Zarathustra, seen from afar looks like a palace built of heavenly substance and shining over the earth; it is like a garment inlaid with stars.

A BOOK of song whose pages are tinged with a light like the sky shown to Zarathustra, it was *Gitanjali* that won for its author his audience over here, and we still return to it as to a first love. Innocent, most of us, of what lay behind it in Indian poetry, we found in these "song-offerings," as the title is in English, an accent that was new to us, yet natural as our own hopes and fears. They took up our half-formed wishes and gave them a voice; they rose inevitably from the life, the imagination, and the desires of him who wrote. They were the vehicle of a great emotion that surprised its imagery not only in the light that was like music, the rhythm that was in the waves of sound itself and the light-waves of the sun; but in the rain, the wet road, the lonely house, the great wall that shuts in

the creature-self, the shroud of dust, the night black as a black-stone.

It was an emotion so sure of itself that it made no effort after novelty or originality, but took the things that occur to us all, and dwelt upon them, and made them alive, and musical and significant. Their effect on those who read them was curious; one famous English critic expressed this effect half humorously when he said: "I have met several people, not easily impressed, who could not read that book without tears. As for me, I read a few pages and then put it down, feeling it to be too good for me. The rest of it I mean to read in the next world. . . ."

To explain the true incidence of song is always lost endeavour. All one can do is to say the lyric fire is there for those who can and care to receive it; and for the others, of what use to try to convince them? You cannot force a reader to like Shelley, or understand the innocence of Blake, any more than you can make an unmusical ear delight in "Aderyn Pur" or the original air of "Lhude sing Cuccu."

The wonder is that a poet born abroad with another mother-tongue than ours should have been able to use English with so sure and spon-

taneous a cadence. Indeed the recapture or recreation of the original spirit in the English page surpasses anything else that we have seen in Oriental verse, since FitzGerald metamorphosed Omar Khayyam. So much so, that it has even been rumoured by sceptical critics in India that *Gitanjali* was in the process indebted to an English ghost; and the name of Mr. W. B. Yeats has been particularly associated with this mysterious office, thanks, it may be, to his known uncanny powers. It may be as well to say, then, that the small manuscript book in which the author made these new English versions when he was on his way here in 1912, is still in the possession of Mr. Will Rothenstein; and any one who takes the trouble to compare the pocket book with the printed text will find that the variations are of the slightest, while in certain instances the printed readings may be criticised as not an improvement on those in the MS.

Rabindranath Tagore, in fact, as you have heard, not only learnt English at home, but came to England when he was a student of seventeen, with a keen curiosity about western poetry and the finer usage of the tongue that

has become the *lingua franca* of east and west. No one who at any time discussed with him matters of style, and the business of verse and prose, could mistake his feeling for English, although he often confessed to a fear that something of its ease and finesse of style escaped him. You have only to mark the difference in quality between the translation of *Gitanjali*, which he did himself, and that of *The King of the Dark Chamber* (which in the edition first issued, despite the evidence of the title-page, is by another hand), to appreciate how delicate is his own touch and his feeling for the salient phrase and the live word. It is of a part with this understanding of our common medium, that we should find in his poetry a spirit more congenial to ourselves than that we usually find in Oriental verse. Our English notion of Indian poetry, especially when tinged as these songs are with religious ardour, is that it lies too far aloof from our hopes and fears to pass the test of our own art. But what strikes one in reading *Gitanjali* is that the heavenly desire is qualified by an almost childlike reliance on the affections, and at times by an almost womanly tenderness. Its pages carry on an old tradition, yet strike

the new emotion of a race, in a mode that is very real, with all its ideality. Combine these two things, and you have solved what is one of the problems of the lyric poet who must use the large language of all poetry, yet adapt it with an inflexion of his own to the particular needs of his own time and his own temperament. In the second page of *Gitanjali* he gives us the key to his melody and to its control of the two elements when he makes his confession:

> When thou commandest me to sing it seems that my heart would break with pride; and I look to thy face and tears come to my eyes.
>
> All that is harsh and dissonant in my life melts into one sweet harmony, and my adoration spreads wings like a glad bird on its flight across the sea.

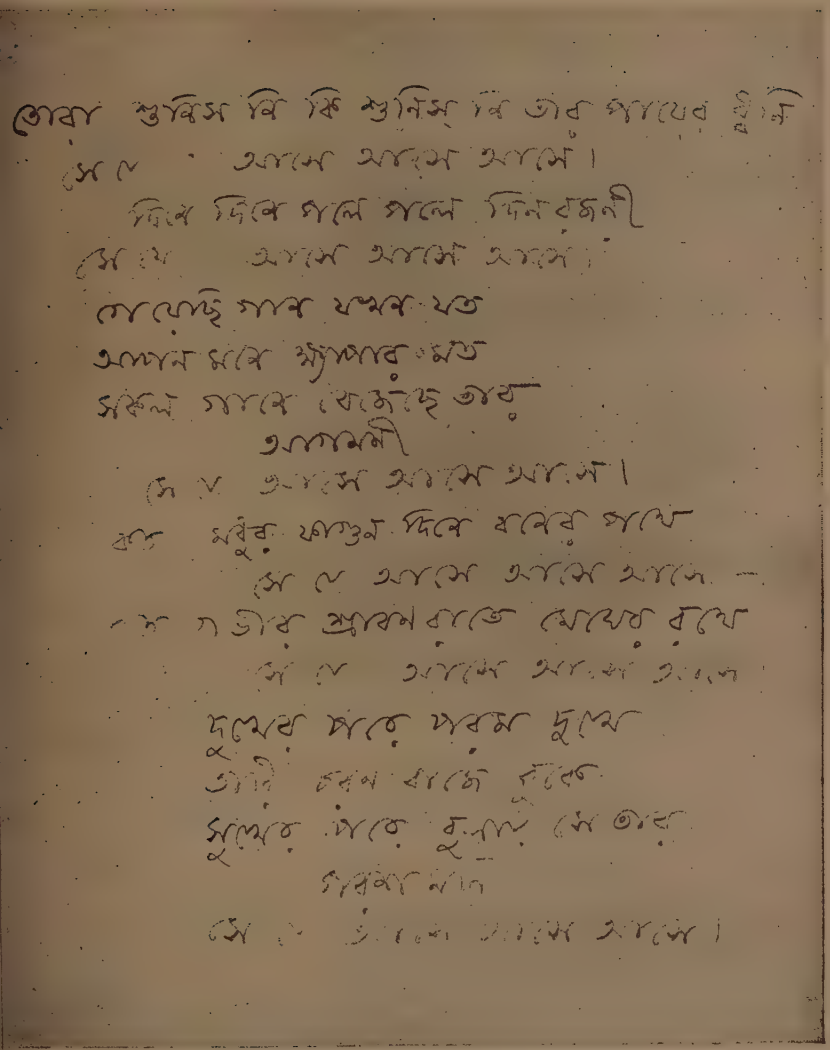
To England the great waves of poetry have often flowed from the regions of the sun. From Greece came an impulse that died down only to revive, and that went on for centuries. From Italy came a reinspiration that affected Chaucer, touched the Elizabethans, and helped to furnish Shelley with his vision of nature transcendent, fulfilled with southern light and sunshine. From Provence, again, came irresistible romance and lyric melody. And now, perhaps, it may prove

to be the vision of India from which we are to get a fresher sense of nature and life and that correspondence of earth and heaven whose perception inspires the poet's ecstasy:

> Let all the strains of joy mingle in my last song. The joy that makes the earth flow over in the riotous excess of the grass, the joy that sets the twin-brothers, life and death, dancing over the wide world, the joy that sweeps in with the tempest, shaking and waking all life with laughter, the joy that sits still with its tears on the open red lotus of pain, and the joy that throws everything it has upon the dust, and knows not a word.

This is the lyric counterpart of the pages in *Sādhanā* that expound the gospel of the flower, the messenger whose form and fragrance declare that "from the everlasting joy all things have their birth." And in the innocence of beauty, which is transparent to the light of the sun, it helps to dissipate the shadow of Māyā, and to repair the cleavage of illusion.

We are like Sita in Ravana's Golden City, in exile, amid all its worldly pomp and sensation; and then a song, a flower, or a beam of light, comes with a message from the other world, and says the words: "I am come. He has sent me. I am a messenger of the beautiful; the one whose soul is the bliss of love. . . . He will



AUTOGRAPH POEM, "GITANJALI," BENGALI TEXT.

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draw thee to him, and make thee his own. This illusion will not hold thee in thraldom for ever."

If *The Gardener* is the song-book of youth and the romance of the young lover who is satisfied with a flower for itself, or for its token of love's happiness, to be realised on earth in a day or night, *Gitanjali* is the book of the old lover who is in love with heavenly desire. He cannot be satisfied, but must always wish to transcend life and sensation through death, and attain not *Nirvana* in the sense of extinction, but *Brahma Vihara*, the joy eternal, the realisation of love in its last abode:

Thou art the sky, and thou art the nest as well. Oh, thou beautiful, there in the nest it is thy love that encloses the soul with colours and sounds and odours.

There comes the morning with the golden basket in her right hand, bearing the wreath of beauty, silently to crown the earth.

And there comes the evening over the lonely meadows deserted by herds, through trackless paths, carrying cool draughts of peace in her golden pitcher from the western ocean of rest.

But there, where spreads the infinite sky for the soul to take her flight in, reigns the stainless white radiance. There is no day nor night, nor form, nor colour, and never never a word.

Those who have heard any of these songs sung to their original tunes, or *ragas* will, as has

been said, still fancy they hear in the English medium some echo of that wilder rhythm. Indeed it seems at times as though the poet had imprisoned the very trace of that dual melody in the English words: the two musics are there, as they only exist in true poetry, whether it be verse to be sung or not.

Of the nature of Indian music itself, and the aid it is able to give to Indian verse, it needs an expert to speak. Mr. Fox Strangways has given us, through the Indian Society, a remarkable account of it in his book, *The Music of Hindostan*, which makes us understand that the difference between it and our own music is as wide almost as that between the languages. The only experience that one can recall in this country which gives any notion of Indian *raga*-singing is that to be gained at the Welsh Eisteddfod, when the *pennillion* singer is improvising (or appears to be improvising) stanzas to the given tune. We may say, too, that the only effects in our western music which offer any suggestion of some of those strange Indian tunes with their half-tones, wailing and beseeching phrases, and unexpected sequences is to be had in some of the older Celtic melody such as we

find it in certain Gaelic songs, and here and there in a snatch of Welsh folk-song. But Indian music is both more independent and less obvious than ours. It is as if one heard the wind sighing and the stream running and occasionally the storm shrieking—for the music can be harsh and strident, too—behind the words. As for Rabindranath's own music, Mr. Fox Strangways has told us that to hear him sing his songs is to realise the music in a way that a foreigner is very seldom able to do. "The notes of the song are no longer their mere selves, but the vehicle of a personality, and as such they go behind this or that system of music to that beauty of sound which all systems put out their hands to seize. These melodies are such as would have satisfied Plato." And W. B. Yeats, envying the conditions which could foster such art, says: "Rabindranath Tagore writes music for his words, and one understands that he is so abundant, so spontaneous, so daring in his passion, so full of surprise, because he is doing something which never seems strange, unnatural, or in need of defence."

He writes, in fact, with faith in his audience and in its cordial delight in what he sings; his

music flows freely because there are eager listeners waiting to accept and to rejoice in his song; and this we discover, as we look back into the history of Bengali literature, comes of the propitious custom of the country.

We must go back a long way, to a time between Chaucer and Shakespeare, to realise the true anticipator of *Gitanjali* in the figure of Nimāi, otherwise called Chaitanya Deva. He lived at one time not far from Bolpur, where Rabindranath Tagore has his home. No one could have told in Nimāi's boyhood that he was to grow up into a poet; for he was the incorrigible imp of his village, with a dash in him of that uncanny prescience which sometimes exists in the fool of nature and the son of the wild. When the pious Brahmins, after their sacred bath, closed their eyes and prayed before the small figures of their gods, Nimāi would creep up stealthily and carry off their images; or he would collect the thorny seeds of the Okra plant and scatter them on the flowing hair of the little girls that went to bathe. Again he would shock his parents by stepping in among the tabooed and forbidden things which a Brahmin must not touch; and, when they admonished him, his reply

was: "If you will not let me study these things, how am I to know what is clean and what unclean?"—words fraught, as his biographer says, with the deepest truths of Vedantic teaching.

The same energy that made Nimāi a torment to his own folk made him throw himself into his school tasks and the study of Sanskrit with a kind of fury. He had soon learnt enough to tease and puzzle his masters and make fun of them and their pedantry. He could not restrain his wit; he was incorrigible in his wild and roguish exploits. At twenty he set up a Tol, or Sanskrit school, and pupils, good and bad, flocked to his feet; for he was a born teacher, knowing in himself how the tough fibres of the rebel mind can best be humoured. He was at this stage still very godless; some would say excess of imagination made him sceptical. "His mind was as clear as the sky, and his temperament like the sweet-scented cephalika flower." It attracted all those who came near him in spite of his teasing, tantalising spirit.

Before he settled down, Nimāi made a tour of the seats of learning in Bengal, where his Sanskrit grammar, young grammarian as he was, had already become the accepted book.

We find him returning home, full of honours, after many months, and catching a delighted first glimpse of the place girdled by the Ganges, its temples rising above the tree-tops. He had married before he left home; and now, as some friends met him half-way and with a touch of his old mischief he mimicked for them the accent of East Bengal, they disappeared mysteriously when he got near his mother's door. On reaching it, he found her in tears, and learnt that his young wife, Laksmī, was dead from a snake-bite. Therewith began the great change that came over him. He was still only twenty-one years old, but the gaiety of his youth had gone.

We hear of him then at the great temple of Gaya, bringing his offerings to the lotus-feet of Vishnu, where the Pandas sang, "These feet, O pilgrims, lead to heaven. From these feet flows the sacred stream of the Ganges. The great saints in their vision desire to catch a glimpse of these feet. Their glory is sung by the god Siva and are made into divine music by Narada. They lead to heaven, these divine feet. There is no other way."

Nimāi appeared to be listening to the song, but in fact heard nothing, for he had fallen into

a trance, and when he came to himself the tears flowed down his cheeks as he told his friends to leave him.

"I am no longer fit for the world," he said, "I must go to the sacred groves to find out Krishna, my Lord, and the Lord of the Universe."

From this time the name of Krishna becomes the refrain to all his invocations and songs of ecstasy. Sometimes for whole nights together he and his little circle of followers would go on singing while his face shone and his eyes gleamed like two stars.

So great, says Mr. D. C. Sen, was the attraction of the personality of Nimāi that sometimes for a whole night the people sang around him unmindful of the passing of the hours, and when the early dawn came they would look wonderingly at the sun, thinking he had appeared too soon. Once at Gurjari, when ending a discourse to the crowd, he cried aloud: "O God, O my Krishna"—we are told that the place where he stood seemed to turn into heaven. A delicious breeze blew upon the people who had gathered in crowds and a fragrance like the lotus floated from him, while the Ma-

harattas of noble family stood round like statues and the holy men listened to his chanting with closed eyes.

It is not only a folk-tradition that shows us the man being made into a myth; we have the testimony of his fellow-poets, and among them Govinda Das. He left a series of notes of Nimāi's career, which have the advantage of giving us real impressions without any attempt to make them fit into a saint's life. He even tells us what kind of food was to be had in Nimāi's house before he turned ascetic. All kinds of fruit and sweet roots; milk, butter, and cream; delicious salads and many kinds of sweetmeats. "I," says Govinda, with perfect frankness, "I, the prince of gluttons, became a willing servant in that house." But the change came, and Nimāi made his stirring declaration: "I shall have my head shaven, cast off the sacred thread, and wander from house to house, preaching the love of Krishna. Young men, children, old men, worldly men, and even the Pariahs will stand round me charmed with the name of God."

In the songs of Nimāi and Govinda Das, and in the poetry Chaitanya inspired, we gain a sense of a country and a people who love poetry,

and in a way live by it, making it a part of their daily existence. And when we try to understand something of the fervour and naturalness and spontaneous melody that mark *The Gardener* and *Gitanjali*, we see what they gained by the love of song and the belief in inspiration fostered among the people of Bengal. Without Chaitanya and such lives as the "Chaitanya Mangal," the Bengal poets of to-day would not be what they are. The living usage of the art—the use of songs actually sung and declaimed, not merely read in the book—has remained a tradition among them, and made poetry not only a welcome, but an inalienable thing.

The author of *Folk-songs from the Panjab* quotes a saying to the effect that music is born in Bengal, grows up in Oudh, grows old in the Panjab, and dies in Kashmir; and as we look into the records of the various Indian tongues and races, we discern what seems to be the working of a finer spirit of song and lyric life in that region of the Ganges over which Nimāi wandered. If there is a congenial folk-element at work which saves poetry there from becoming a victim to the dark distemper which verse must always dread,—begotten in the literary

schools and of the literary habit,—there is some grace too in the Bengali tongue which makes of it a rare instrument, alike free from the academic airs of Sanskrit and from the mixed idiom of the base dialects.

So far as an ignorant Western reader can learn, Rabindranath Tagore has been able in his poems and other writings to preserve with uncommon felicity and naturalness of effect the balance between the Sanskrit and the Bengali idioms. He has the instinctive sense which warns him off the schoolman's word and the intimidating note of pedantry, and in *Gitanjali* the Bengali tongue has been, we are told, carried to its most forcible and melodious pitch. It has the quality begotten of the inherent music of a tongue, which we find in the best of our Elizabethans, who wrote with a true regard for the spoken word and its clear enunciation, using all those associations of word behind word, and thought within thought, to which Coleridge alludes in a famous passage of the *Biographia*.

CHAPTER IX

A SPIRITUAL COMMONWEALTH

God, the Great Giver, can open the whole universe to our gaze in the narrow space of a single lane.—*Jivan-smitri*, RABINDRANATH TAGORE.

IN Shanti Niketan we shall see how Rabindranath Tagore has sought to develop the idea of a House of Peace, a boys' republic, a schoolhouse without a taskmaster, to serve as a model to young India. With a similar desire it was that he followed the steps of his father, the Maharshi, into that religious republic which, to a western eye, looks at first like the gathering up of the ideals of Brahmanism and Christianity into a common fold. We need reminding perhaps that the India in which Ram Mohun Roy set up the Brahmo Samaj was not quite the India we know now, and that in 1841, when Devendranath Tagore joined the movement, the current Brahminism was still deeply tinged with idolatry. Even now all the ages of India's religious history, from first to last, are represented

in Bengal and other provinces. The strange cult of Siva still goes on, although it is remarkable that what was once only a god of destruction, who might have been invoked in Europe during this year of war, has been transformed. Siva, whose four arms used to wield deadly weapons, has been changed by the Purānas into "a calm, serene and beautiful deity"; and Kailāsa, his city, has become the proverbial abode of happiness. Nevertheless, the other Siva survives, and the people in the northern provinces still do *puja* to the elephant-trunked Ganesha and the monkey-god.

We western people are very liable however to mistake the signs of that faith. Take the description of the grottoes of Siva by M. Loti, in which the sensation of the overwhelming antiquity of the east, and its splendour, terror, and gloom are realised with western avidity. The traveller reaches Golconda—the "phantom of a town," from Hyderabad, and passes gates which give access to a chaos of granite. Daulatabad, another phantom not unlike a tower of Babel, is passed, and Rozas is reached, and a kind of sea—really desert-plains, burnt and scorched to sand and dust—appears there in

the very centre of India. Beyond, on its sad margin, lie these terrible caves of Ellora, which he reaches at nightfall, and with some trouble he finds a guide with whom to penetrate the arcana.

At first the guide hesitates; but they decide to enter a vast avenue, with ribbed sides and vault faintly lit by their lantern, suggesting the vertebræ *d'un monstre vide*. Passing down the cave, which has the proportions of a Gothic cathedral, they can dimly discern in recesses the upright figures of deities, 20 to 30 feet in height, motionless and calm in outline. But the cave enters upon a second stage, and here the guardian deities stand out of the gloomy background, contorted in every expression of agony and fury. To add to the terror, a babel is aroused of birds of prey, whose shrieks resound through the length of the Temple.

When issuing under the open sky they see the stars, they look up to them as if from an abyss, and realise they have only passed the peristyle of the Temple. The heart of the mountain has been carved out, leaving vast granite walls which spring up into the night, terrace superposed upon terrace, carved into pieces of

gods eternally at battle, that seem to threaten the explorers at every moment. Their way is now blocked with obelisks, gigantic carved elephants, pylons and minor temples,—forms suggesting every passion of terror and cruelty. And Siva, the terrible Siva, the procreator, the slayer with many hands to slay, is everywhere. In the heart of all lies the ultimate temple—a great monolith supported upon caryatid elephants, unexpectedly simple and restful in design. The monolith contains three chambers, the last of which is the impenetrable Brahmin shrine. Within its simple walls, deep in the soot of a thousand incense-flames, is revealed the final symbol of the faith of that Siva who creates only to destroy.

For a companion cartoon to that of the grottoes of Ellora, very different in effect, take that of Amritsa painted for us in the autobiography of Devendranath Tagore:

I went to Amritsar, my heart set on that lake of immortality, where the Sikhs worship the Inscrutable Immortal One. Early in the morning I hurried through the town to see that holy shrine of Amritsar. After wandering through several streets I asked a passer-by at last where Amritsar was. He stared at me in surprise and

said, "Why, this is Amritsar." "No," said I, "where is that Amritsar where God is worshipped with sacred chanting?" He replied, "The Gurudwara? Oh, that is quite near; go this way." Taking the road indicated, and going past the bazaar of red cloth shawls and scarves, I saw the golden spire of the temple shining in the morning sun. Keeping this in view, I arrived at the temple, and saw a big tank dug here by Guru Ramdas. He called it Amritsar. This was the lake, and was formerly called "Chak." Like an islet in the midst of the lake there is a white marble temple which I entered by passing over a bridge. In front there was a huge pile of books covered over with a parti-coloured silk cloth. One of the chief Sikhs of the temple was waving a plume over it. On one side singers were chanting from the sacred books. Punjabi men and women came and walked round the temple, and having made their salutations with offerings of shells and flowers, went away—some stayed and sang with devotion. Here all may come and go when they please—nobody asks them to come, nobody tells them not to. Christians and Mahomedans, all may come here, only according to the rules none may enter the bounds of the Gurudwara with shoes on. . . . I again went to the temple in the evening, and saw that the *arati* or vesper ceremony was being performed. A Sikh was standing in front of the Books, with a five-wick lamp in hand, performing the *arati*. All the other Sikhs stood with joined hands repeating with him in solemn tones:

In the disc of the sky
The sun and moon shine as lamps,
The galaxy of stars twinkle like pearls,
The zephyr is incense, the winds are fanning,

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All the woods are bright with flowers,
Oh, Saviour of the world, Thine *arati*
Is wonderful indeed! Loud sounds the drum
And yet no hand doth beat.

Now we can realise the new deliverance for which the father of Rabindranath worked, bequeathing the work as a legacy to his children, when we turn to the faith of the "Brahmo Samaj," which he founded in 1843, and recall the profound feeling with which he spoke of his reform: "During my travels, how often," he said, "have I prayed to God with tears in my eyes for the day when idolatrous ceremonies would be abolished from our house, and the adoration of the Infinite commence in their stead."

The foundation of "Brahma Dharma" grew naturally out of these experiences of the old Indian religions, but the basis was hard to find. When he began to think of his new religion he felt the need of an inspired foundation for his beliefs. First he went to the Vedas, but found no help there. Then he went to the Upanishads, but found himself face to face with a hundred and forty-seven of them, preaching most contrary doctrines. It seemed eventually any and everybody began to publish anything and every-

"The Place where the Great Sage Maharshi Devendra Nath used to meditate."

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thing doctrinal under the name. Even the eleven authentic Upanishads presented many contrary doctrines. They, like the Vedas, were given up.

These Upanishads could not meet all our needs, could not fill our hearts. Where was the foundation of Brahminism to be law? I came to see that the pure heart, filled with the light of intuitive knowledge, was the true basis. Brahma reigned in the pure heart alone. . . . We could accept those texts only of the Upanishads which accorded with the heart. Those sayings which disagreed with the heart we could not accept.

In one Upanishad we read:

God is revealed through worship to the heart illumined by an intellect free from all doubt.

To the soul of the righteous is revealed the wisdom of God.

These words accorded with the experience of my own heart, hence I accepted them.

In heaven there is no fear, thou art not there, O Death, neither is there old age. Free from both hunger and thirst, and beyond the reach of sorrow, all rejoice in the world of heaven.

He who sins here and repenteth not of his sinful deeds, and instead of desisting therefrom, falls into sin again and again, enters into doleful regions after death. Holiness leads unto holy regions and sin unto regions of sin.

He says elsewhere:

When I saw in the Upanishads that the worship of Brahma leads to Nirvana, my soul was dismayed. "All deeds together with the sentient soul, all become one in Brahma." If this means that the sentient soul loses its

separate consciousness, then this is not the sign of salvation, but of terrible extinction. . . . This Nirvana salvation of the Upanishads did not find a place in my heart.

. . . . . .

We must add a portrait from his own book to understand the human strain in the Maharshi's religion:

My grandmother was very fond of me. To me, also, she was all in all during the days of my childhood. My sleeping, sitting, and eating were all at her side. She was a deeply religious woman. Every day she used to bathe in the Ganges very early in the morning; and every day she used to weave garlands of flowers with her own hands for the family shrine.

And at her death the Ganges is still the background of the mournful last ceremony. The pious old woman was carried down as her death drew near, according to custom, but unwillingly and protestingly, to the shed by the Ganges. She lived three nights.

On the night before her death I was sitting on a coarse mat near the shed. It was the night of the full moon; the funeral pyre was near.

The sound of a chant came to him, and a sudden sense of the unreality of earthly things stole upon him. The thought of wealth and

luxury, of soft carpets and hangings, became repugnant. As he sat there alone, a young man of eighteen, a complete revulsion of feeling took place in his mind, and half consciously, half unconsciously, he gave himself to poverty and God.

Some idea has already been given of Devendranath's imaginative powers, and we see that, in those gifts of heart and mind which a father can hand on to a son, the elder Tagore was rarely endowed. He provided the congenial atmosphere in which that son's nature could grow to its full flourish.

It remains only to add the three articles of his simple creed, to be found in the little book of guidance that he once drew up for his followers:

1. In the beginning there was naught. The One Supreme alone existed. He created the whole universe.

2. He is the God of Truth, Infinite Wisdom, Goodness and Power, Eternal and All Pervading, the One without a second.

3. In His worship lies our salvation in this world and in the next.

The sequel to this *Credo* of the Maharshi is to be found in the book of meditations by his son and his disciple.

CHAPTER X

A BOOK OF MEDITATIONS

Sanat Kumara the Venerable showed to Nārada, when all his faults had been rubbed out, the other side of darkness.

THE addresses and lay-sermons that made up the prose-book, *Sādhanā*, were given in America, and again in England, very much as we now have them in its pages. The English course was delivered at Westminster, in the Caxton Hall, during May and June 1913, and they had a profound effect on their hearers. Rabindranath Tagore has that unexplainable grace as a speaker which holds an audience without effort, and his voice has curiously impressive, penetrative tones in it when he exerts it at moments of eloquence. Something foreign and precise in the turn of an occasional word there may be; and there are certain high vibrant notes which you never hear from an English speaker. But these differences, when for instance he spoke of "Ravana's city where we live in exile," or of Brahma, or when he paraphrased a text of the Upanishads,

only helped to remind us in the Westminster Lectures that here was a speaker who was a new conductor of the old wisdom of the east, and who, by some art of his own, had turned a London hall into a place where the sensation, the hubbub and actuality of the western world were put under a spell.

As for the book, no printed page can quite repeat the things that lend force to sentences made pregnant on the lip. There were allusions, figures, and particular instances in the lectures to be remembered as full of a warm colour which has faded in cold print. The most characteristic passages were those in which the speaker's imagination fused the given theme. Then he was like one drawing on a fund of ideas too fluid to be caught in a net, too subtle to be held except in a parable, or an analogy out of poetry. In fact, the speaker himself was the argument; his homily took fire from his own emotion. Listening to him one realised that he who spoke was one who had been living in the eye of the sun, communing with the air, the stream, the spirit of the forest, and the hearts of men and women. In that regard, we ought to accept *Sādhanā* as a book of thoughts on life and its realisation: the medi-

tations of a poet, and not an attempt at a new and complete philosophy. Those pages in it that most clearly reflect its writer's experience, tested by his imagination, are those that bring us most stimulus, presenting as they do ideas that pierce the crust of our habitual half-belief, words that touch the springs of our real existence. It is a testament that needs to be related to the history of him who wrote it in order to have its full weight and its power in relating the material to the spiritual world. More than once, in referring to his work, he laid stress on this human fulfilment of a faith which has constant new revelation behind it, whose truth is decided by the first accent of the lover, the first cry of the mother who, turning to her babe, affirms in one fond word the doctrine of love and the indestructible unity of the universe.

"Man was troubled and lived in fear so long as he had not discerned the uniformity of law in nature; till then the world was alien to him. The law that he discovered is nothing but the perception of harmony that prevails between reason, which is the soul of man, and the workings of the world." But the relation of the mere understanding is partial, whereas the relation of

love is complete. "In love the sense of difference is obliterated, and the human soul fulfills its purpose in perfection, transcending the limits of itself, and reaching across the threshold of the infinite."

Usually in our ignorance of the doctrines accepted by the Rishis in India, we have figured their road to perfection as one leading into the void. Buddha said, however: "It is true that I preach extinction; but only the extinction of pride, lust, evil thought and ignorance; not that of forgiveness, love, charity, and truth." Even the lower self is only purged, and in its sensual appetites extinguished, that the higher self may be delivered from what Rabindranath calls 'the thraldom of Avidyā.'" When a man lives in that thraldom, he is shut up in the close confines of the lower; his consciousness is not awake to the higher reality that surrounds him; he does not know the reality of his own soul.

"I bow to God over and over again who is in fire and in water, who permeates the whole world, who is in the annual crops as well as in the perennial trees."

The whole genius of India and the race of which Rabindranath Tagore comes tended to

that supernal thought and its human realisation. The *Rishis* were those who, having realised it in the heart and in the mind, and in all the activities of the world, had attained Nirvana. Their followers were taught to believe that in sun and wind, in earth and water, in all the play of life around them, the living and ideal creative spirit was made real. The earth did not only serve to hold and condition man's body; it fulfilled and enhanced his whole being. Its contact was more than a physical contact; it was a living presence. The water did not only cleanse his limbs; it made clean his heart, it touched the very garment of his soul. As Goethe taught in *Faust:*

> In Being's flood, in Action's storm
> I walk and work, above, beneath,
> Work and weave in endless motion:
> . . . . . .
> 'Tis thus at the roaring Loom of Time I ply,
> And weave for God the garment thou seest Him by.

The one symbol amid the kindred elements which helps to express to us the unity of the universe is that of the Sun. Often, when in London, Rabindranath would laugh at the smoky sunlight as only the shadow of the sun of Bengal.

Passage after passage in the Upanishads may be recalled telling of that splendour, and the responsive gleam it kindles in the thought of the men living to grow daily more wise beneath its creative rays:

"The sun is the honey of the gods. The heaven is the cross-beam, and the sky hangs from it like a hive; the bright vapours are the swarming bees. The eastern sun-rays are the cells. Like bees the sacred verses of the scripture brood over the Rig Veda sacrifice like a flower. From it, so brooded upon, sprang as its nectar, essence, fame, glory and splendour of countenance; vigour, strength, and health. That essence flowed out, and went toward the sun; and out of it is formed the rosy light of the rising sun."

In his fourth discourse Rabindranath turns to the hard problem of Self. It is characteristic of his understanding of human nature that he should show so keen a sympathy with the egoistic desire of the creature to go free in its own right. "The whole weight of the universe cannot crush out this individuality of mine. I maintain it in spite of the tremendous gravitation of all things." Again: "We are bankrupt if we are deprived of this specialty, this in-

dividuality, which is the only thing we can call our own; and which, if lost, is a loss to the whole world." So he interprets the craving of the ego, assuming its very accent for the better enunciation of its personal pride. But the paradox of the ego is easily resolved. Its tireless self-consciousness is in effect, if it but knew, a result of the desire for fulfilment in the widest plane. It is the burning of a wick that is fed from the sources of the sun. When the sun rises, the flame bows and yields itself up to the greater illumination, and this is Nirvana, "the symbol of the extinction of the lamp." It does not mean night; it means that the day has come.

But we have to realise the truth which the doctrine of the two selves, lesser and greater, taught in the Upanishads, makes plain—that the gleam in the lamp is the same as the master-light. "Listen to me, ye sons of the immortal spirit, ye who live in the heavenly abode. I have known the Supreme Being whose light shines forth from beyond the darkness." To attain that light we have to render back the small fire lent to the lamp, since the soul's tenure of the body is finite. There begins the great mystery, the

death of the body, which, in the estimate of the *Rishis*, accords very well with that of Jeremy Taylor, who said that of all the evils in this world which are bitterly reproached with their bad character, death is the most innocent of its accusation.

We cannot detach the doctrine of the greater illumination and the philosophy of life on which it rests, expanded in *Sādhanā*, from Rabindranath's lyrical expression in *Gitanjali* and *The Gardener*. The essence of the lyrical imagination lies in the power to transcend the single delight by conferring it in song upon all creation and every fellow-creature. The unity of emotion that it works toward may seem in the first impulse to be alike selfish, self-conscious and intensely self-assertive. In reality, the self-intensity is only due to the confining of a force, an energy in delight, which is ready to break its shell, to seek out its joy-fellows and in the end to forget itself.

By his songs and by his religious ideas alike Rabindranath is a lyric interpreter of natural and supernatural, and of the human nature they condition. His belief in the joy of life, and the realisation in created forms of the eternal happiness, is one that belongs to the doctrine of

"Brahma-Vihara" and the harmony betwixt earth and heaven. We seem, as we listen to him, to be passing out of a great town—symbol of our crowded civilisation—on a summer morning, and looking up into a concave of sky which watches for the pure eyes of Sita below it. The vessel receives the pure element according to its depth of innocence. "Where the sight has passed into the void, there is the real personality of the eye." "If the eye is satisfied, the sun is satisfied; if the sun is satisfied, heaven is satisfied." So with the innocence of the eye (to use Ruskin's phrase), and with the heart of a child, one can enter into the joy of the four regions and conquer the worlds.

In his fifth discourse Rabindranath brings his series of realisations to a period with his pages on the mystery of love. "Who could have breathed or moved if the sky were not filled with joy, with love?" The soul is on pilgrimage: it is travelling from the law, which assigns its relative place in the moral order, to love, which is its moral freedom. Buddha named this infinite love Brahma-Vihara—"the joy of living in Brahma." And he taught that whoever would attain to it must purge himself

from hatred, and the malice of deceit, and the rage of injury. The free spirit was he who could have measureless love for all creatures—even as a mother has it for her only child.

The light within, the little ether in the heart, is continually flowing out to join the light without: it is the water-drop going to the sea, the child to the mother, the eye to the sun. Thus is fulfilled the circle of realisations. "From joy are born all creatures, by joy they are sustained, towards joy they progress, and into joy they enter." With this perfecting of the circle of delight our whole being dilates; a luminous consciousness of the far greater world about us enters the soul, and obsesses it. Then it is, indeed, that our spirit finds its larger self, and becomes sure it is immortal. "It dies a hundred times in its enclosures of self; for separateness is doomed to die, it cannot be made eternal. But it never can die where it is one with the all." There is the secret of that persuasion of immortality, which is instinctive in most of us, with the instinct of life itself and the obstinate desire for its perpetuity. Now convert the term of joy into love, and you have the lyric formula complete, which was behind the songs of the Vaish-

nava poets and is behind those of *Gitanjali*. "From love the world is born, by love it is sustained, towards love it moves, and into love it enters."

We pass on to the chapter which treats of realisation in action—a very interesting one to us because it is there we have thought the Indian ideal was most apt to fail. In its pages Rabindranath tells us clearly where the ideals of east and west differ, and where they may complete one another. In the west, he says, the soul of man is mainly concerned with extending and externising its powers. It would leave aside that field of inner consciousness where its true fulfilment lies. There is no rest in the process of its material development. Its politics talk of progress, meaning a new stretch of sensation; its science talks of a restless never-ending evolution; its metaphysic has now begun to talk of the evolution of God Himself. Because of this insistence on the doing and the becoming, the Indian seers of to-day perceive the dangers in the western world of the tyranny of the material side of civilisation and the intoxication of power. "They know not the beauty of completion," says Rabindranath. In India the

danger comes from the want of outward activity. Her thinkers despise the fields of power and of extension. Their intellect in its attempt to realise Brahma "works itself stone-dry," and their heart, seeking to confine him within its own outpourings, turns to emotion and neglects the stern bonds of law and the discipline of the real. These are the extremes on either side; for the truer philosophy of the east, as we find it in the Vedas and the Upanishads, does not neglect the natural fulfilment of the activity of nature. "Knowledge, power, and action are of his nature," says the Upanishads, and again, "By his many-sided activity, which radiates in all directions, does he fulfil the inherent wants of all his different creatures." Rabindranath, coming as a true intermediary between east and west, sees in the life of meditation and in the life of action the two principles at work which are as the poles of our being; and he ends with this characteristic prayer to the Worker of the Universe:

"Let the irresistible current of thy universal energy come like the impetuous south wind of Spring, let it come rushing over the vast field of the life of man; . . . let our newly awakened powers cry out for unlimited fulfilment in leaf and flower and fruit."

The realisation in the flower and the leaf, and in the forms of beauty, is the next in the sequence. It is through our feeling for the beautiful in nature and in art that we realise harmony in the universe, and the pleasure of its correspondence with the innate desire in ourselves.

There remains but one link more to be added to the chain before the ends are riveted; and that is the master link. The other self, the divine self, the Lord of all, says the Upanishad, encircled all; bright, incorporeal, scathless, pure, untouched by evil. He, the Seer, the wise, the self existent, the omnipresent—he disposed all things rightly for eternal years.

At the close of *Sādhanā* we find the philosophy of the great renunciation put into its simplest terms. We give up all our worldly possessions, our sensual ties, our affections, powers, and honours, one by one. There is an end of getting and having. This ego, the small self, may desire to appropriate to itself a little of the uncontainable wealth of the universe. To what end? Can the house detach a piece of surrounding air or a stretch of overarching sky and say, This is mine, and mine only? As well may the soul try to take for itself what is free element, or the individual try to detain the universal. For everything in the universe, says the Upanishad, is enveloped by God. Each living thing is part of the commonwealth of

heaven. Try the most common of illustrations:

> When we take food and satisfy our hunger, it is a complete act of possession. So long as the hunger is not satisfied, it is a pleasure to eat. For then our enjoyment of eating touches at every point the infinite. But once our hunger is satisfied, when the appetite reaches the end of its non-realisation, there is the end of its activity and its pleasure. We are greater than our possessions, and the wise man is he who despises his property, knowing well that this night and every night his soul is required of him. What weight is that of sense and sensation, of getting and hoarding, which holds back the free spirit from the communion of heaven?

Not by knowledge, not by any prescience or traditional ideas, can we attain Brahma. But the Holy Spirit can be known by intuition, and joy is its winged messenger. "Mind can never know him," says the Indian sage in the Upanishad; "words can never describe him; he can only be known by our soul, and her joy in him, and her love." This is the last realisation, that of the infinite; attained through the breaking up of the finite, which tries to bind the universe in its meshes, and to tie beauty—to take Campion's phrase—to one form.

It may seem that, in working through the

layers of finite experience marked off by the colours of good and evil, the brightness of life and the darkness of death, to the realisation of the infinite, the author of *Sādhanā* has let the poet in him avert the rigour of the discipline assigned by the Brahminic doctrine. But do not think him, because of his interpretation of the twin functions, joy and love, and their effect in the approach to the *Amrita* of eternal bliss, a diverter of the moral law. The way is long and hard, and the divine joy can only be won by driving out the sensual and the alimental affections of our nature. "That in which the poet rejoiced—the breath of life, in its revealed forms—in that the gods themselves exist." But evil must be driven out by means of that spirit which is hidden in *prana*, the breath of life; only when it is driven out can the enlightened man go to the world where he becomes one with God.

The old Indian seers taught us that he who had grown wise by his meditation, and by his understanding therefrom of that life-breath, will have his reward in the end. At the time of death he will go free, although his mortal state may seem at first to be that of the rest of men.

The sensual activity will pass into the mind, the mind-activity into the breath of life, and that breath into the Five Elements. These elements, again, will be absorbed up to their seed in the highest self, and there the old birth ends. But then it is that the subtle body rises again, and emerging, reaches a ray of the sun, and takes the northern or southern course that leads him to the road of light—Archis. This light and its concomitant powers lead him forth on to the new plane, where he can create joy in all its forms, and give those forms material bodies, and put living souls in them; and he can move in these at will. At last, through this creative energy, he arrives at the higher knowledge, that of the higher self; and at the end of this second birth attains Brahma.

Rabindranath Tagore has shown us in *Sādhanā* a path, not for the Sanyasi and the ascetic, but one which every man may tread on his way to the first gate of mortality. Joy may attend his steps there, and love may be his guide; but there is more in the interlude than they at once can discover; and what that more is, and the mystery and the judgment that stands at the gateway like the angel with the sword, can be

divined by turning from that profound parable in a drama, *The King of the Dark Chamber*, to the Upanishads and their doctrine of the King of Heaven.

CHAPTER XI

SHANTI NIKETAN

Then they said to the mind, "Do you sing for us." "Yes," said the mind, and sang.—*Upanishads.*

To know how education can be made musical, both in the old way and the new, we should turn to the school of peace at Shanti Niketan.

In our idea of the Eastern mind the end of its intelligence was meditation; all Indian doctrine in our estimate pointed to a gradual absorption of the principle of life into the final perfection of rest. The path towards such a perfection being long and difficult, the exercises which were followed in order to attain it were correspondingly difficult and obscure. The whole of education seems to have consisted in the study of a moral and physical philosophy of definite character.

The many gorgeous arts of India, her music, her science of healing, her language, her crafts, belonged to the domain of active life. Such accumulated knowledge of the arts of life was

handed down from father to son, from mother to daughter. The schools and universities had no part in such knowledge; their training was for eternal ends. I am not sure that the training in reading and writing that came to be given to selected children in the village schools was not looked upon in the beginning as an initiation into the first step of the path to heavenly wisdom rather than as preparation for the art of living.

The earliest shape taken by this idea of the philosophic school or university is found in the *Asram*, or forest school, of ancient India. According to an old custom, the youth in his student days left home and went to stay with the Guru or wise man in his hermitage, there to lead the simple ascetic life of the learner and disciple, and to live close to the very heart of Mother Nature, away from all the excitements of cities. This old ideal of education appealed very strongly to Rabindranath. Recently he has said in a Bengali article, "We do not want nowadays temples of worship and outward rites and ceremonies; what we really want is an Asram. We want a place where the beauty of nature and the noblest pursuits of man are in a pleasant harmony. Our temple of worship is there, where outward

SHANTI NIKETAN—THE SCHOOL.

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nature and the human soul meet in union. Our only rites and ceremonies are self-sacrificing good works."

It is not only to such ancient and pure ideals that Rabindranath responds; he is keenly alive to all that is most noble in the ideals that here and now make themselves felt in our keen and tumultuous modern societies. Unlike the traditional Guru or master of India's earlier days, while he believes in aspiration, he believes also that the will, purified in aspiring, should translate its faculty into the material and actual.

As his philosophy expressed in *Sādhanā* declares, he looks to the constructive realisation of life; and his work for the younger generation has taken human form in the remarkable little community near Bolpur, where his ideas have had free egress. The realisation in action, which is an article of his faith, has there found its living fulfilment. Shanti Niketan was originally founded by his father, who had there a house, garden, *mandir* (small temple), library, and all conveniences for retirement and study.

In talking of his own schooldays, Rabindranath Tagore spoke with the feeling of a man who had suffered much and needlessly in his

own boyish experience, and had sought a cure for so deterrent and mortifying a discipline in the case and for the sake of others. To some it may seem that the trouble which we recognise in our own schools is due in part to the obstinate great ailment of youth itself. To him it seemed possible to find a more natural way of education, by going back to instinct and going on to a new understanding of the imaginative and the humane needs of the growing boy. In India the folk live in the open, as we cannot in this country, and it is easier there to bring the solace of nature and her doings out of doors to bear upon her children.

In trying to get a notion of Rabindranath's method, we ought to know something of the Indian schools as they were; as indeed, it is to be feared, they still are in many parts of Bengal. Some of the accounts remind us not a little of the old Irish hedge-school. In one village, described in *Bengal Peasant Life*, the master was a good mathematician and logician and a hard disciplinarian. His rod was a long thin bamboo cane: "You could hardly pass the door during school hours without hearing the *shop-a-shop* of the bamboo switch." A more

extended chastisement was ironically called *Nadu-Gopal*, that is Gopal's or Krishna's sweetmeat—the sweetmeat being a brick. In fact, two bricks were used, the boy in disgrace having to kneel down on one knee, with his arms outstretched, when a large brick was placed on each arm. If he let one of them fall the bamboo switch fell just as surely on his pate. Even the *Welsh-Not*, a board that used to be hung round the necks of children in Welsh schools to punish them for using their mother-tongue, was not so humiliating as the *Nadu-Gopal*. Yet another punishment was that of stinging the naked body of a boy with a kind of nettle—*bichuti*—much sharper than ours in its venom. These were not the invention of this particular tyrant, but a regular part of the old country school tradition.

Then as to the things taught: the one essential matter to begin with was learning to write the characters—no easy acquirement in Bengali, because of its arabesque and convolute forms. In the old village schools a boy did nothing but write for some years. He began with chalk on the ground itself; then came the reed pen and ink, with a palm leaf for paper. So there was a floor class and a palm-leaf class; and by slow de-

grees the urchin went on from one to another, and having the fear of the bamboo rod and Gopal's cruel sugar-plum, and the stinging *bichuti* to keep him diligent, he learnt in time his three R's, and how to indite letters and read books.

The principle of certain schools in India as in England was that the discipline ought, and was meant, to be hard and penal. There was no notion of making the work a delight or of showing how knowledge enlarged a boy's heart, put him on terms with nature, and gave him control over his own powers and the big world and his fellow-creatures. If a boy played truant he was brought back, tied to bamboo-poles by two of his older fellow-pupils like some miscreant or dangerous criminal. How admirably and helpfully Rabindranath Tagore has made use of the common interest of the boys at his school, converting cruelty into true discipline, we shall hear at the turn of another page.

The sympathy and understanding he has for a youngster's difficulties are to be learnt in his tales. In the story of Fatik, he has made for us a small boy's tragedy, which tells how easy it is for a child to miss happiness when he is sensitive and unfriendly fate cuts across his

affections. Fatik is one of those boys who have too much unregulated nervous energy and too keen a wit to be able to square their own comfort with that of their elders. Even his own mother, whom he loves dearly, does not know how to manage him; his quarrels with his brothers incur her wrath, and when an opportune uncle appears and takes him off to town—Calcutta—the change does not prove lucky. Fatik is not a welcome visitor to his aunt, and there the boy's tragedy soon ends.

The measure of Fatik's unhappiness at school gives us the practical reason for the needed reforms which must come if education is to be humane and such as to develop all that is best in the pupil. It is from the lips of one of his own pupils, who was educated for nine years at Shanti Niketan and is at present an undergraduate of Pembroke College, Cambridge, that we have chiefly gathered the following account of his remarkable experiment.

Like most schemes that bear fruit the school arose in a natural way from little beginnings. As we said, the Maharshi in his early youth had retired there for meditation, and it was there, under the great "chatim" tree, that he first

received his enlightenment. The place, therefore, became very dear to him, and he founded a garden on that plot of land, and built a house and a temple of coloured glass with a white marble floor where, according to the trust deed, "every morning and evening, each day throughout the year must be performed the worship of the one true God." This Shanti Niketan, or Abode of Peace, was kept open to the outside public. Any one wishing for a few days of quiet meditation was welcome there as a guest, and the place was known as a religious hermitage before the school was thought of.

It was while residing there that the idea of reviving the Asram, the forest school of ancient India, occurred to the mind of Rabindranath, and it was as an experiment in this direction that in the year 1901 he began to keep a little school with two or three boys only. In two years' time there were eighteen pupils. In four years' time the number had risen to sixty, and there are now two hundred boys at Shanti Niketan.

As for the routine of the school, I will use as far as possible the words of Rabindranath's own pupil:

Early in the morning, at 4.30, a choir of boys go round the school singing songs, and rouse the sleepers up into the beauty and calm of early dawn. As soon as they are up the boys set to cleaning their own rooms, for from the beginning they are taught not to despise any manual work, but to do for themselves without the help of servants as far as possible. After that they all have to go through some physical exercises in the open air, followed by the morning bath, after which each retired for a quarter of an hour's quiet meditation.

A recent visitor to the school gives us a fuller account of this early morning meditation.

At 6 A. M. a most musical gong tempted us to look out. The guest house in which we were staying was in the centre of a rural garden. Dotted about among the trees were a number of separate dormitory buildings of the simplest type. Out of them the boys were streaming, each with his mat, to take up a place under some secluded tree for the fifteen minutes of meditation which was to follow. There was something strangely moving in the sight of these little figures in white, pricking out the scene all round, each under his several shrub or tree. Then another gong, after which they all move reverently in procession into the school temple.

A very brief service comes after breakfast; before school, the boys are assembled and chant together a "Mantra" from the Upanishads. Morning school is from 8 till 11.30. All classes

are held in the open air when the weather is fine; in fact, then the whole life of the school goes on out of doors. It is a garden school. The various classes meet under different trees in the grounds, each boy, when there is writing to be done, taking his own mat, ink-pot, paper and pen.

At twelve o'clock they have their dinner. Because of the afternoon heats of India, practically all the hard work of the school is got through in the morning hours. In the afternoon the work is light; they have their lessons to prepare; then comes tiffin, and games, drilling, gardening follow. In place of joining in the games some of the older, more capable boys go to the neighbouring village, where they hold evening classes to teach the village-lads. After games come the evening bath, meditation, and the chanting of a Sanskrit hymn before the last meal, and when the meal is over the scholars have an hour of story-telling, acting dramatic scenes, singing, and so on. This pleasant time is not shared in by the older boys who are working for matriculation; in their case extra hours of work are necessary, but for all the rest evening study is forbidden.

After the day's work they retire to bed at half-past nine, and a choir of boys again goes round the school singing evening songs. They begin their days with songs and they end them with songs.

As for the school discipline, that is a matter that has been diligently thought out by the founder. During his visit to America he inquired most carefully into the most intelligent systems of education; he did the same while staying in England. There were no sources of information on the subject that he did not explore. His scheme of education for his boys was to be distinctively national, patriotic, absolutely Indian, of the very soil of Bengal; yet it was to be infused with and aided by the highest and most intelligent thought and method of which the human spirit had hitherto made itself master. What mattered creed or race or caste so that the collective spirit of mankind served and was served? In this Rabindranath has shown himself to be faithful to his belief that the one spirit of life suffuses all creation with its healing rays, no creature being excepted.

It was, I believe, through his knowledge of the successfully applied principle of self-

government in the George Junior Republic of America, that it came to be the rule at Bolpur that the boys should be left as much as possible to themselves, and manage their own affairs without any interference from outside.

The boys elect a captain for every week, who sees that order is kept, and the boys have to obey him implicitly. Under the captain are many sub-captains, also elected, who have each under their special charge a group of six or seven boys whom they have to look after. There is a sort of court of justice held that sits every night. Breaches of conduct on the part of any member of the school are brought before it for trial. It is only extreme and difficult cases that the teachers themselves have to deal with, and such only occur very rarely.

One of the most remarkable effects of the religious spirit in which the school is carried on is that no great distinction exists between the teachers and pupils of Shanti Niketan; all are learners together, all are endeavouring to follow the one rising path. Public opinion, as expressed and felt by the boys, has its influence on the teachers as well. Punishment takes the form of a complete boycott of the offender, who is reinstated at once on confession of his fault; corporal punishment of any description is absolutely forbidden.

Add that the physical well-being of the boys is very carefully attended to. They are trained to be hardy and self-reliant, and have regular daily drilling, exercises, and games. Most of the prizes given at the sports competition of the district are carried off by the Shanti Niketan boys. Fire-drill is punctually gone through. "Recently," says our undergraduate friend, "a fire broke out about midnight in the town of Bolpur, which is about two miles from the school; the boys at once raced to the town, and after some hard work got the fire under, while all the townspeople stood crying out and watching it helplessly, not knowing what to do."

The account of Shanti Niketan would be incomplete unless some idea were given of the part taken by Rabindranath Tagore himself in conducting the school.

Not many fathers speak of their sons with as great a longing and affection as the poet did of his boys. "I am far happier there with them than anywhere else." His affectionate care of them is a powerful spirit in the school; it was its birth-spirit, and it sustains the place and all who live and work there. "The boys call him Gurudu, which means the revered master.

He takes no active part in the daily routine of the school, although sometimes he takes classes in literature and singing, and encourages the boys to bring him their efforts at original work, both in painting, drawing, and poetry. He often spoke to me with enthusiasm and hopefulness of their original work and of the pleasure he felt when they carried their first-fruits to him. In every branch of art he is their inspirer; at the end of each term the boys in general produce and act one of his plays. He himself joins them and takes a part in the play, whatever it may be. When lately *The King of the Dark Chamber* was produced by the school, he himself took the part of the King, and his superb rendering of it will long be remembered by those who acted with him and by those who witnessed it."

"Surely," writes the same educationist, "never was there a leader of youth so many-sided in faculty, so apt to answer with encouragement all young attempts in art. No one who has seen the work of the new Calcutta school of painting can doubt that the movement of the young Indian renascence is already well under way. One of the leading spirits of this new school is Abanindranath Tagore, brother of the poet;

his pictures alone convince one of the reality of this new life. One of them, 'The End of the Journey,' a simple painting of an exhausted camel kneeling, head to ground, against a sunset background, is one of those pictures that reveal a world, though but a tiny thing.

"Such are the fostering influences among which the youths of Shanti Niketan grow up; influences likely to prove of incalculable good effect. In the education of the young it is the great personality that effects the great results. Who could have foreseen when Froebel first led his flock of children over the hillside, singing songs and weaving flower-wreaths, that the spirit evoked would revolutionise the education of children all the world over? It did not seem a great thing when Madame Montessori took over the school for feeble-minded children in Rome, and by force of wisdom and insight developed in them a greater intelligence than was shown by the children of the normal schools. Yet what may not this system of voluntary self-education effect in the future? I know of one school where on one day in the week the children are allowed to choose their own lessons. That day is looked forward to the whole week round.

"But to my mind there is something more natural and delightful, more truly wise, in this new school of Mr. Tagore's than in anything that has yet been done. It will be most interesting for us all to watch the results. There is no doubt that the genius of Shanti Niketan is one of originality, enthusiasm, and freshness of experiment."

As for the poet's more intimate religious influence over his boys, let me quote from Mr. Bose: "His great personality silently permeates the whole atmosphere of the school and inspires every member of the Institution with the divinity and nobility of his character. When he is in the school he meets the boys twice a week regularly in the *Mandir* or temple, and speaks to them simply and in his own homely way on the great ideals of life." The boys look forward eagerly to these meetings with their founder. Besides such regular occasions there are other special days in the year—the anniversary of the founding of the school, New Year's Day, the festivals associated with the birth or death of the great spiritual teachers of mankind, when services are held in the *Mandir*. These services are always conducted by Rabindranath him-

self, when he is present at the school. Here are translations of the Mantras which are chanted in unison by the scholars morning and evening, and which wonderfully express the heart of universal religion:

The Mantras of the Morning

I. Thou art our Father. May we know Thee as our Father. Strike us not. May we truly bow to Thee.

II. O Lord! O Father! Take away all our sins, and give us that which is good.

We bow to Him in whom is the happiness.
We bow to Him in whom is the good.
We bow to Him from whom comes the happiness.
We bow to Him from whom comes the good.
We bow to Him who is the good.
We bow to Him who is the highest good.
Shanti Shanti Shanti Hari Om.

The Mantra of the Evening

The God who is in fire, who is in water, who interpenetrates the whole world, who is in herbs, who is in trees, to that God I bow down again and again.

A few of the school rules and practical details, likely to be of interest, are given to complete the rough chart:

Shanti Niketan

1. This Asram is situated on high ground in the middle of a wide plain open to the horizon on all sides. It is one and a half

miles from Bolpur Station on the East Indian Railway (Loop line), and is far from the distractions of town life.

2. Here the boys are taught Sanskrit, Bengali, English, Mathematics, Science, History, Geography, and Nature Study, and may be prepared for the Matriculation Examination.

3. Classes in agriculture and manual work, such as carpentry, etc., will shortly be opened, and eventually every boy in the Asram will be expected to take up one of these practical subjects.

4. Special attention is given to the development of the moral and spiritual life of the boys, and they are encouraged to be self-reliant, active, and fearless.

5. The boys live constantly with the teachers, and in every dormitory one or two teachers are placed to supervise the boys.

6. In the early morning and afternoon the boys are given light meals; the two chief meals, at 11 o'clock and in the evening at 7 o'clock, consisting of rice, dal, and vegetable curries, together with ghee and milk.

7. Meat and fish are forbidden. There is a dairy attached to the Asram.

8. Those boys whose guardians, for caste reasons, wish them to eat separately are allowed to do so. But if any boy, of his own accord, wishes to eat with the other boys, he is neither prevented nor punished.

9. Special food is not provided for any boy, even on payment of extra money.

10. There is a doctor with one assistant who looks after boys when they are ill. When boys are ill they are placed in the hospital, where the doctor resides.

CHAPTER XII

CONCLUSION

With the visit of Rabindranath Tagore to our country in 1912 and 1913 this account comes to a natural pause. If we anticipate at all, it must be along lines interwoven with the future of India herself. In his farewell words, spoken before he set sail in September 1913—amid the bustle of the railway-platform at Euston station—he spoke with concern of the need for a better understanding between his people and ours. There had lately been some terrible floods in Lower Bengal, affecting the district below Bolpur and above Calcutta and causing great destruction; and yet the English papers hardly spared a line to mention the disaster; and on this side of the world the only adequate description was that given by a Berlin journal. This indifference on our part to the everyday welfare of his countrymen causes many a bitter reflection in those who are working with him for India's new deliverance.

In one of the early chapters of this book it was shown how closely the ideal expressed in his poems and stories is affected by his hopes and fears for India. The help she has rendered in the present war to Britain is indeed a sign of the times; but it is in states of peace that the two lands and the allied races are destined to prove the doctrine, which he and his father, the Maharshi, have preached, of a greater community of men upon earth. Every word that helps to strengthen such a faith in our commonwealth is a godsend; and a poet like Rabindranath is more powerful by his songs to-day than any would-be world dictator in strengthening the intercourse between east and west and giving to India her part and her voice in the commonalty of nations. Such a message as that implied in the eighty-fifth song of *Gitanjali* should be read over again at the end of his political testament:

When the warriors marched back again to their master's hall, where did they hide their power?

They had dropped the sword and dropped the bow and the arrow: peace was in their foreheads, and they had left the fruits of their life behind them on the day they marched back again to their master's hall.

Another series of *Gitanjali* has been written in the last year or two, not yet published in

RABINDRANATH TAGORE.

May 6, 1914.

From a photograph by Johnston & Hoffmann.

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a book; when it is we shall find that it takes the realisation of these ideas yet a stage farther towards their goal. In *Nature's Revenge* its hero, the Sanyasi or recluse and would-be triumpher over nature, thought to solve the old troubles of the human intelligence by the victory of the mind over the heart of man. In the new *Gitanjali* the poet looks for that reconciliation of the two selves and the spirit of the atom with the spirit of the universe, which calls also for the reconciliation of the races. It is all part of the message hidden in a saying of the Upanishads:

> The ether which is around us is the same as the ether within us, and that is the ether within the heart.[1]

The pages of *Sādhanā* showed us that its writer expressed something new, something closer to ourselves, in the relation of his genius to the genius of his race. He has drawn upon human nature and found there that living presence whose body is spirit, "whose form is light," and that self which is smaller than a corn of rice or a canary-seed kernel, yet greater than earth or heaven, or than all the worlds. The whole bur-

[1] *Khandogya-Upanishad*, iii. 15.

den of his songs and his writings goes to assure us that he does not stand in the regard of a saint or a *Rishi* who is above our common nature or apart from it. He is of us and has felt our passions and appetites; he has known the love of man and woman, sons and daughters, and small children. He has experienced the trouble it takes to make a poet out of a man, and a man out of a poet. In one of the songs in *The Gardener* he tells how in the morning the singer cast his net into the sea and dragged up from the salt depths strange things and beautiful—some which shone like the smile, some that glistened like the tears, some flushed like the cheeks of the bride. At the end of the day he carries them to his love, who sits in her garden, but she despises them. Then he realises that they are not worthy of her; and one by one, as the night goes on, he flings them out into the street. But in the morning travellers come and pick them up and carry them into far countries. This is the song, or, if you like, the parable, of the poet's lost endeavour, out of which spring the ideas that travel all the world over. It is so with these birds of passage, his songs. You surprise in them, as you read, that orient stream which,

like the rising sun, is destined to flow the world over; and the true poets are able by their votive songs to make themselves and their writings conductors to that luminous stream.

It is only in our own time that the day-spring of India has at last found its way into the outer world. Many signs have seemed latterly to point to the fulfilling of an old promise of the East. Workers like Max Müller, Professor Rhys Davids, and the translators of the *Mahabarata* and the *Ramayana*, the Vedic Hymns and Sacred Books of the East, have laid open the literature. It only needed that the heaven-sent intermediary should come who would set the seal of his art on the work of the scholars, and bring the wisdom of India home to the western men.

When we take one of those love-songs of *The Gardener*, in which the lyrist sings naturally as the first blackbird in spring, we are aware of an older music than that declared in the open notes. The emotion of a thousand springs enjoyed before that particular morning is in them, echoing cadences that were heard in the hymns of the Vedas a thousand years ago. If we turn from those lyric pages to *Sādhanā* we find that it too quickens immemorial ideas in its pages. It

expresses the Indian mind under new religious forms, more constructive, more intelligible to us, than the old; and after pausing to make us feel the habitual difference between east and west, it goes on to point the way to a common deliverance and a spiritual commonwealth.

We must turn to the Vedanta, and the doctrines gathered up in the *Brahma Sutras* fourteen, fifteen centuries ago, and to their great exponent, Sankara Acharya, if we would understand both what the old philosophy was and what the new portends when it is refired by a mind like Rabindranath Tagore's. The ideal structure, reared out of the Vedantic ideas by Sankara, is the highest, it is claimed, which eastern thought has built. Its teaching has become part of the very "life blood of the nation." Names like Sankara's are the ties between the old wisdom and the new.

When Zarathustra asked Ahura to tell him his name, among the many he gave in reply were two which are remarkable—the seer or "discerner" and the "healer." They might serve very well to mark the kindred functions which Rabindranath Tagore made his own in that later phase of his career, when the trouble

of his own days had made him more keenly alive both to the new predicament of India and to the needs of men and women all the world over. His temperament, his love of nature, and the life of meditation that the Indian sun favours, might have led him to retire from the struggle for the new order. A sharper force drove him to look to the ailment of his time, and he became, instead of its ascetic, or its hermit in the wilderness, its healer, its discerner and its lyric poet in one.

THE END

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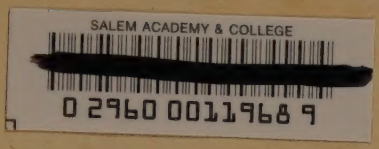

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